Two Passengers For Chelsea

and other plays

Oscar W. Firkins

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TWO PASSENGERS FOR CHELSEA

AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

OSCAR W. FIRKINS

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF ARTS AND LETTERS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
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NOTE

"Two Passengers for Chelsea" and "The Undying Prince" (the latter in an abridged version) were originally printed in *The Cornhill Magazine* (London). "The Reference" and "The Looking-Glass" were printed in *The Drama* (Chicago) and "The Unbidden Guest" in *Poet-Lore* (Boston). The author thanks the editors and the publishers of these periodicals for permission to reprint. To Mrs. Edith Wharton's admirable story of "The Other Two" in "The Descent of Man" he is probably indebted for a germinal idea (the approximation of three successive matrimonial partners of the same person) which is developed by different means to a new result in "The Emeralds."

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TWO PASSENGERS FOR CHELSEA

AND OTHER PLAYS

TWO PASSENGERS FOR CHELSEA

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM BINGHAM BARING, *heir to the Ashburton peerage*
LADY HARRIET BARING, *his wife*
JANE WELSH CARLYLE
THOMAS CARLYLE
GIUSEPPE MAZZINI
ALFRED TENNYSON
RICHARD MONCKTON MILNES
CHARLES BULLER
TRAVERS MILDMAY
FOOTMAN

The action takes place at Addiscombe, a Baring estate in the Croydon suburb of London, between ten and half past eleven of a bright May morning in the year 1847. The morning-room at Addiscombe Farm, on which the curtain rises, is large and long, furnished in dark oak with pictures and bronzes. The middle section, which is frowned upon by a huge old fireplace and chimney-piece in the back wall, is sombre enough to be just perceptibly avoided by the guests, but the two ends of the room are very cheerful. That at the spectator's right looks out from the deep recess of a sixteenth-century bow-window upon a broad sweep of undulating landscape, while the view to the left is stopped by garden trees and shrubs in the luxuriance of bright leaf and early blossom. The entrances are in the back wall near the corners, right and left. At the left entrance Jane Carlyle appears, followed by Thomas.

JANE CARLYLE. Thomas, you shouldn't have eaten that cherry tart.

THOMAS CARLYLE. At great houses, my dear, one eats the wrong thing while one waits for the right one. At the moment nothing was in sight but cherry tart. The edible uni-

verse was reduced for the time being to cherry tart and I—I was hungry. (*He takes easy chair left.*)

JANE (*at the window left, looking out*). Thomas, save the universe for Cheyne Row. I am thinking of your stomach.

CARLYLE. I was thinking of my hunger.

JANE. That is unimportant. With Cerberus in a man's inside—

CARLYLE. They fed honey-cakes, you know, to Cerberus.

JANE. I know—when they wanted to go down into hell.

CARLYLE. Ye know the classics—to their depths, Jane.

JANE. As to visiting hell, Thomas, I need no help from the classics. I can go down there in my own person—or in yours.

CARLYLE (*not ungenially*). We have had our travels, Jeannie—in all quarters.

JANE (*hands on chair-back, facing Carlyle*). And I have to leave you here to contend all by yourself with the enticements of cherry tart and—

CARLYLE. And what?

JANE (*repressing an impulse to specify*). Nothing else. Cherry tart is quite enough for a feeble man like you to contend with. (*With a slightly noticeable carelessness.*) You *are* staying?

CARLYLE. Perhaps. She wishes it.

JANE (*with pointed innocence*). She?

CARLYLE (*falling, as often, into voluntary dialect*). Dinna play the fool, Jane. It's a part Nature has not qualified ye for.

JANE (*very urbanely*). I understand, my dear. There is a time in a man's relations with a woman when "she" becomes a proper name. But I didn't know you'd quite reached that point with Lady Harriet.

CARLYLE. As for that, there's a point in a man's relations with a woman when the pronoun "she" becomes a coronet. Ye should know that yourself. (*He speaks bluffly, as if to excuse the blandness of the words.*)

JANE. Thank you, Thomas. I begin to think cherry tart agrees with you.

CARLYLE. She wants *you* to stay, too.

JANE. She? (*Feigning to bethink herself.*) Oh, yes. But I really must go back to Chelsea, that is, if I can find a carriage, or a dogcart, or a wheelbarrow to take me to the station. One can trust to nothing in a house like this. They put heliotropes in your bedroom and forget the soap.

CARLYLE. Ay, ay, giddypates, featherheads, all of them. (*Enter Footman, right, with the* Times.)

FOOTMAN (*offering paper to Jane*). *Times,* Madam? (*He goes out.*)

JANE. Will you have the *Times,* Thomas?

CARLYLE (*reaching for it*). Why not?

JANE. Because you never read it at Chelsea—in the morning.

CARLYLE. A man's mornings in his own house are serious, Jane, but here!—the *Times* fits like a knicknack on a woman's dressing-table. Besides, it shuts out the company. Is that somebody coming? (*He hastily screens his face with the unfolded* Times.)

JANE (*seating herself near Carlyle, and speaking low*). It is Mr. Travers Mildmay. (*Carlyle utters something between a grunt and a moan. Enter, at right, Mr. Travers Mildmay, young, scrupulously dressed, sometimes tongue-tied, sometimes blunt.*)

TRAVERS MILDMAY. Good morning, Mrs. Carlyle. (*Jane Carlyle bows graciously.*) Good morning, sir. (*Carlyle growls an inarticulate response.*) A fine day.

CARLYLE. Fire-new from the old mint.

MILDMAY (*at a loss*). Sir?

CARLYLE. The morning's a coin, I say, sterling metal, with the king's head stamped on it.

MILDMAY (*still at a loss*). I suppose so.

JANE. You must excuse my husband, Mr. Mildmay. It isn't

insanity; it's cherry tart. He has had too good a breakfast.

MILDMAY. Does that make him—

JANE. Yes, it makes him lyrical. Let us hope that poetry will be the only consequence. At home, now, where he eats bread and butter, he is fairly rational.

MILDMAY. I should enjoy talking to literary men—if they'd only talk like other people.

JANE. Try him before breakfast, Mr. Mildmay.

MILDMAY. The breakfasts here are very irregular.

JANE. There is system under it, Mr. Mildmay. Each rank breakfasts at its own hour. The peasantry break their fast at nine.

CARLYLE (*not to Mildmay, but dispersedly to the walls and furniture*). That's for me. She's a doctor's lass.

JANE. The commoners breakfast at half past nine; the minor gentry at a quarter past ten; and the earls and marquises at eleven. The earliest arrivals in England come last to the breakfast room. (*Demurely.*) Have you breakfasted, Mr. Mildmay?

MILDMAY. Half an hour ago.

CARLYLE (*in a moment's truce with Travers Mildmay*). That puts ye down with us.

MILDMAY (*with an air of achievement*). That's high enough.

CARLYLE (*again putting up the* Times *as a breastwork*). Humph!

MILDMAY (*glancing out of the window*). Mr. Tennyson is coming in.

JANE. Is Mr. Tennyson up?

MILDMAY. Yes. He breakfasted with me.

CARLYLE. Another peasant, Jane.

JANE. Oh, we can't hold Mr. Tennyson to any rule. Poets are the most simple-hearted creatures. For them morning begins at daybreak. (*Enter, at left, Alfred Tennyson, thirty-eight years old, large, a little stooping, lazily majestic,*

goodhumoredly saturnine, with a lounging stateliness of gait. He comes over to Jane and Mildmay, exchanging nods of succinct cordiality with Carlyle.)

TENNYSON (*to Jane*). Good morning.

JANE. Good morning, Mr. Tennyson. You come from the garden, I see. Have you been teaching the thrushes music?

TENNYSON. No. (*Pause.*) I should as soon think of teaching—felicity—to Mrs. Carlyle. (*He has, in the slow utterance of this compliment, the effect of a half-skilled navigator bringing to port a heavy cargo through a choppy sea.*)

JANE. You are turning courtier, too?

CARLYLE (*sunk in his chair and in the* Times). His pension has corrupted him.

TENNYSON (*who has seated himself, while Mildmay, feeling a little neglected, moves off to the other end of the room*). You know who got me that pension?

CARLYLE. How should I know who gives pensions?

TENNYSON (*in his ruminative bass*). You know Richard Milnes, don't you?

CARLYLE (*the* Times *on his knees*). Ay, I know Milnes, God forgive me for including such a popinjay in my acquaintance.

TENNYSON (*fixing his eyes on Carlyle*). Who spoke to Milnes?

CARLYLE (*letting the paper fall to the ground*). Who spoke to Milnes? Heavens, man, do you think I keep a register of all the simpletons in the British Isles under my forehead?

JANE. Don't mind him, Mr. Tennyson. That is just his way of saying that Milnes is a very decent fellow, and so he is. (*Enter, at left, Richard Milnes, well dressed, smiling, with a social ease that finds vent alternately in stingless cynicism and unfeigned kindness.*)

RICHARD MILNES. Who is that saying that I am a very decent fellow?

CARLYLE. Not me, Richard, God be praised; I haena that load upon my conscience.

MILNES. It wasn't your voice, I think, Tennyson.

TENNYSON (*sincerely*). It wasn't my voice, Milnes; though it expressed my feeling.

MILNES. Then it comes home to you, Mrs. Carlyle.

JANE. I was just explaining to Mr. Tennyson that my husband has his own way of expressing fondness. When he says: "The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon," all he means is: "Sit down, my dear fellow, and have another pipe."

CARLYLE. D'ye hear what comes frae the creature? And men marry the jades, knowing all the while that they have tongues! (*He resumes the* Times, *as if in renunciation of human society from that time forward.*)

JANE. Sit down, Mr. Milnes, unless you want to go into the garden. Mr. Tennyson has been out already listening to the thrushes.

TENNYSON (*simply*). I went out to smoke.

JANE (*with a disdainful gesture*). Ah, these poets! Their trade is disenchantment.

MILNES. I know that Lady Harriet is inexorable on tobacco. But I will sit down, Mrs. Carlyle, since I don't feel any great need either of smoke or thrushes at this moment. (*He takes a chair.*)

JANE. You look ridiculously cheerful. I believe you slept last night.

MILNES. I did. My sleep is masterly.

JANE (*with velvety satire*). Each of us has his accomplishment, Mr. Milnes.

MILNES. Thank you. Are you learning the art of paying compliments from your husband? (*They both glance at the* Times *behind which Carlyle is ambushed.*)

JANE. No, my wickedness is all original, a poor thing, but mine own. (*She observes the* Times *narrowly.*) My dear, you are reading that paper upside down.

CARLYLE. It's every bit as sensible that way as the ither.

JANE (*surprised into familiarity*). Milnes, I verily believe he put that paper down and took it up wrong side first for the express purpose of making that remark. (*They wait for a retort, but Carlyle is, or seems, oblivious.*)

MILNES (*after a pause, in a low tone, which escapes the confidential*). Don't you think that Mr. Carlyle reads the world much as he is now reading the *Times?* He holds it upside down and finds it nonsense.

JANE. Exactly. And Mr. Carlyle means to turn the world upside down and find the sense in it.

MILNES. The rest of us find it fairly sensible as it is.

JANE. That's because you are standing on your heads to read it. You don't expect Mr. Carlyle to stand on his head, do you?

MILNES (*laughing*). No, we don't expect that. (*Enter, at right, Lady Harriet Baring, a regal woman, with a fine, dashing geniality, convertible at the shortest notice into authority or disdain.*)

LADY HARRIET (*speaking to persons without*). Where is Charles Buller? Such a man! When Charles Buller is wanted for Addiscombe, he is almost undiscoverable, and when we have him at Addiscombe, he simply cannot be discovered at all.

VOICE OFF STAGE. Mr. Buller has gone for a ride, Lady Harriet.

LADY HARRIET. He leaves us for our horses. I always said he could discriminate. Come in, both of you. (*Giuseppe Mazzini, melancholy and brooding enthusiast, enters the room, followed by Baring. Mildmay is already on his feet; Milnes and Tennyson have risen at Lady Harriet's entrance; Carlyle pointedly keeps his seat. Lady Harriet includes the whole company in a bright nod, then turns to whisper an aside to Baring.*) That young Mildmay is sulking in a corner. He mustn't be allowed to get peevish. Go to him, William. Convince him that he is somebody. Two min-

utes will do it. (*Baring moves toward Mildmay, whom he engages in a quiet conversation, while Mazzini, following Lady Harriet at a rather cautious distance, crosses to left stage. Lady Harriet continues.*) Mr. Milnes, you are blooming as usual. Mr. Tennyson, we saw you from our upper windows in the garden at a legendary hour. Mr. Carlyle, I'm sorry I can't thank you for rising to greet your hostess when she enters her morning-room after breakfast, but I am glad that you appreciate my chairs.

CARLYLE (*getting up in a perfectly deliberate and unembarrassed fashion*). I am on my feet, not for the lady, but—

LADY HARRIET (*peremptorily*). For what, then?

CARLYLE. For the woman.

LADY HARRIET. That deserves any reward—even a chair. Sit down, Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Milnes, Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Mazzini. I hate to see a man idle on his feet. (*The men seat themselves, while Lady Harriet approaches Jane Carlyle.*) Let us look at this woman.

JANE. Am I to get up, too?

LADY HARRIET. If you please, my dear. I can't inspect you in that retirement. (*Jane rises with mock dudgeon, and offers herself to Lady Harriet's imperious scrutiny.*) Mrs. Carlyle, you outshine us all. With that color in your face you will not venture to tell me that you have not slept.

JANE. I am sure the color is much obliged to you.

LADY HARRIET. You have slept, then?

JANE. I slept—in particles.

LADY HARRIET (*to the men*). I believe the woman falls asleep and dreams that she is awake and reports her dreams as history the next morning.

MILNES. In other words, her sleeplessness is a nightmare.

LADY HARRIET. You put the case with masculine brutality, Mr. Milnes, but you say what I mean.

JANE. Men utter the brutalities that women only think; that is why women are so fond of their company.

LADY HARRIET (*to Jane*). The only really sleepless thing about you is your wit. Its wakefulness is scandalous.

JANE (*her eyes traversing Lady Harriet's person from foot to forehead*). It caught the disease at Addiscombe.

LADY HARRIET (*graciously masterful*). Mrs. Carlyle, will you have the kindness to remember that I hate flattery?

JANE. I have observed that there are no persons whom it is safer to flatter than those who hate flattery.

LADY HARRIET (*to the company*). Isn't it provoking that this person has gone and married herself to Mr. Carlyle, and has made it indiscreet for me to box her ears?

JANE (*with affected gravity*). I shouldn't advise you to do that, Lady Harriet, in my husband's presence.

CARLYLE. Eh, Jane, why not?

LADY HARRIET. You think he would defend you?

JANE (*meekly*). He would defend his prerogatives. (*This requires some seconds to sink in, but finally scores a general laugh, in which Carlyle's bass outvoices all the rest.*)

LADY HARRIET. We will give you one more chance to better your record. If you sleep to-night, we may possibly forgive you. (*She sits down, and Jane, obeying her signal, sits down by Mazzini.*)

JANE. I can't sleep here to-night. I am going home by the half past eleven.

LADY HARRIET. To Chelsea?

JANE. Yes. (*Pause.*) Our villa in the Riviera isn't open.

LADY HARRIET. I ignore your levity. Don't you know that Mr. Carlyle is here?

JANE. Yes, I know that my husband is here, but my house is in Chelsea.

LADY HARRIET. It won't run off, I suppose?

JANE. No, Lady Harriet, but it runs down. A house like ours has to be painted and papered and subjected to various tortures from time to time, and I—I am the grand inquisitor.

LADY HARRIET. But Mr. Carlyle tells me that all this doesn't begin till Tuesday.

JANE (*with a peculiar look at her husband*). Mr. Carlyle is most communicative. It doesn't begin till Tuesday, Lady Harriet, but—I have to break the news to the house.

LADY HARRIET. She thinks her very house has nerves.

JANE. It has.

TENNYSON (*with a certain robust shyness*). Hasn't it some excuse for nervousness? (*He stops.*)

LADY HARRIET (*with mock severity*). Proceed, Mr. Tennyson.

TENNYSON. It has sucked in—a French Revolution.

JANE (*smiling at Tennyson*). Not to mention little Reigns of Terror which it sets up on its own account.

LADY HARRIET (*affecting the Titaness*). Mr. Tennyson, if you are here to abet Mrs. Carlyle—

TENNYSON (*with unexpected courage*). I can't imagine any better reason for being anywhere.

JANE. Alfred, if I do not kiss you for that, it is only in order not to scandalize Lady Harriet.

LADY HARRIET. Mr. Carlyle, I think she should go home.

CARLYLE. Nay, she's but a flighty lass. She would kiss the postman if he brought her a letter she wanted.

LADY HARRIET. You trust her, then, Mr. Carlyle?

CARLYLE. Divil a bit. I trust Alfred.

LADY HARRIET (*changing the subject with a tactician's quick perception of a check*). With your nerves, Mrs. Carlyle, I somehow can't see you in a household maelstrom.

JANE. Ah, you see, if one has a hurricane in one's nerves, it is thankful for a little company.

LADY HARRIET (*with entire geniality*). Then you are quite sure that you want to go and that you don't need Mr. Carlyle's help?

JANE. Lady Harriet, my husband in a domestic squall is about

as helpful as a seasick passenger in the cabin is to the skipper in the storm on deck.

CARLYLE (*to Lady Harriet*). She should have gone home yesterday.

LADY HARRIET. When Mrs. Carlyle points out the delinquencies in her husband, she reminds me of the woman that swept cobwebs out of the sky.

JANE. Thank you for forgetting that she was an *old* woman, Lady Harriet. No, Mr. Carlyle is literature, and literature at the proper time and place is highly captivating; but literature groaning because its inkstand is in the coalscuttle, literature fuming because its nightgown is in the garret or its toothbrush in the paintpot, is quite another matter. No, it is best that literature stay at Addiscombe and be taken care of by Lady Harriet. I have already made that suggestion to literature, and literature has listened with the most beautiful docility.

LADY HARRIET (*to Carlyle*). Then it is all settled—you will stay?

CARLYLE (*in his large way*). We shall see, we shall see. (*Enter, from the right, Charles Buller, over forty, six feet three, flushed with riding, athletic, unabashed, and carelessly good-natured.*)

LADY HARRIET. Charles Buller at last. (*Buller advances toward his hostess with a stride modulated, as it were, to the drawing-room, and kisses her hand with brusque deference.*) Your tardiness has cost you dear, Charles. You have missed some delightful exposures of Mr. Carlyle by his wife and some particularly sharp things that I have been at the pains to tell the company about you.

BULLER (*who has been scattering nods and handshakes in all directions*). As to the first loss, Lady Harriet, I am sorry to have missed any abuse of my old tutor (*he nods toward Carlyle*) or any scintillations from his wife. For the second loss I hope to be compensated in the near future.

LADY HARRIET. You read my intentions perfectly, Charles. It appears that you find our horses interesting.

BULLER. Engrossingly so.

LADY HARRIET. We have noticed that. Mr. Baring and I are very grateful to our horses. They keep several desirable friends on our visiting list.

BULLER. Lady Harriet, I will not undervalue your horses even to flatter the first woman in England. Keep your stables, and my heart is yours.

LADY HARRIET. You must come and show yourself to Mr. Baring. You can spare a minute for the lower animals? Come, all of you. (*In the responsive movement which follows, Jane and Mazzini are a little slower than the rest, and Lady Harriet gives emphasis, gives finality, as it were, to this backwardness by her swift remark.*) You two want to stay behind? Please yourselves by all means. (*The party moves to the right. Jane re-seats herself beside Mazzini.*)

JANE (*tranquilly*). They have left us to ourselves, Mazzini.

MAZZINI (*simply*). I am glad to be alone with you.

JANE (*faintly indicating Lady Harriet*). You like her, don't you?

MAZZINI. Very much. She is a great lady.

JANE. She is more than that, Mazzini. She is a fine creature.

MAZZINI. That is what Mr. Carlyle likes, I think—the fine creature.

JANE. True, my dear. It is the fine creature that he likes. (*She pauses.*) But he likes—*to be liked*—by the great lady.

MAZZINI. You English are hard on each other.

JANE. Are we?

MAZZINI. I think sometimes that you do not deserve your liberty. You are hard and greedy—and you are free. And the races that throb and aspire—they are chained.

JANE. That is true, and you know why, don't you? We English have liberty because we can content ourselves with its prose. You Italians want its poetry, and so—

MAZZINI (*bitterly*). We do not even get its prose.

JANE. Quite so. Some day you will learn prose from us. Then, perhaps, you will get your Italy.

MAZZINI. It is hard to get what one has never had.

JANE. There is a thing still harder, Mazzini: *to get what one has.* (*Her eyes wander toward Carlyle, now talking keenly with Lady Harriet.*)

MAZZINI. I do not understand that.

JANE. To get back what one has never lost! But that is foolishness. (*She changes the subject resolutely.*) When do you expect your Italy will wake, Mazzini?

MAZZINI. Who knows? The sleep is drugged; that is the trouble. But I have hope; sometimes I say to myself, next year.

JANE. Have you never feared that Italy's waking might be like— (*She pauses half repentingly.*)

MAZZINI. Like what?

JANE. Like the waking of Juliet—*in the tomb?*

MAZZINI (*wincing*). Ah, you are cruel.

JANE. Forgive me. I was thoughtless. I meant nothing. (*There is a burst of laughter from the other group.*) We are quite on the edge of things, Mazzini.

MAZZINI (*trying to smile*). I am used to exile.

JANE (*reaching for his hand*). Ah! (*Pause.*) Well, let her exile us, if she chooses. She is a queenly woman.

MAZZINI. I am glad she is not a queen.

JANE (*looking at him curiously*). Why?

MAZZINI. She would make it hard to be a revolutionist.

JANE (*with a faint edge in her voice*). You feel that way about her?

MAZZINI. Yes, don't you? You called her a fine creature just now.

JANE. Oh yes, that. It's easy to offer praise, Mazzini. The hard thing is to agree to it.

MAZZINI (*very simply indeed*). I do not understand women.

JANE. Neither do I. (*She looks toward the other group.*) Is that Mr. Travers Mildmay actually detaching himself from Lady Harriet? I believe he is coming to us.

MILDMAY (*slightly fatigued and discontented*). May I sit down here, Mrs. Carlyle?

JANE. By all means. In this out-of-the-way district we are pining for dispatches from the capital.

MILDMAY (*perfectly blank, but seating himself*). Ah!

JANE. What are our friends talking about?

MILDMAY. They are talking about the Corn Laws.

JANE. Is Lady Harriet talking about the Corn Laws?

MILDMAY (*ingenuously*). She is talking more than anyone else.

JANE. Is she really? That must be looked into. You don't care for the Corn Laws, I judge, Mr. Mildmay?

MILDMAY. They may be all right. I don't know. It's hard to feed everybody.

JANE. Mr. Carlyle would begin with the poor.

MILDMAY. It's simpler not to begin.

JANE. Was Lady Harriet supporting the Corn Laws?

MILDMAY. Yes. She let no one else speak.

JANE. I'm afraid you're not fond of women, Mr. Mildmay.

MILDMAY. I like them well enough—if they'd let a man speak.

JANE. We have another recruit, Mazzini. (*Charles Buller is crossing to the group at left.*) Mr. Buller, you surprise us. Have you been sent to Coventry?

BULLER (*seating himself easily*). No, I've fled to Coventry—if this is Coventry. Coventry appears to be a very habitable place. Do you happen to be contemplating any experiments in the line of Lady Godiva?

JANE. Mr. Buller, please speak low. I am nearly ruined in Lady Harriet's esteem already. The one thing needed to complete my fall would be the mention of my name in connection with Lady Godiva.

BULLER (*easily*). I fancy Lady Harriet would like to play the part of Lady Godiva herself.

JANE. I fancy she would, but I don't think she would like to see the chance of doing it first snapped up by any other woman. The only proper indecorums are those which begin with the aristocracy.

BULLER (*with absolute unconcern*). Lady Harriet's a nice woman.

JANE. You seem to fight with her a good deal.

BULLER. Oh yes, a standing fight is the easiest way to handle such a woman. It saves a man from the sillier sort of nonsense, and it keeps the woman occupied; it keeps her from asking the man to treat her seriously.

JANE. You don't like serious women?

BULLER. No, women are bad enough when they are frivolous.

JANE. I believe you are trying to get up a standing fight with me.

BULLER. I should enjoy it of all things.

JANE. No, if that is your attitude, it would be sinful to oblige you. I shall leave you no excuse for not treating me seriously —unless, indeed, you want to try me with the sillier sort of nonsense.

BULLER (*with a something that might or might not be seriousness*). Carlyle is a lucky man.

JANE. Tell him so, Mr. Buller, tell him so. (*Milnes leaves the group at the right and crosses to Mrs. Carlyle and her companions. From this time on the liveliness transfers itself to the group at left.*)

BULLER. Hallo, Milnes. Are you an emigrant, too?

JANE (*looking at Lady Harriet*). I should call him a refugee.

MILNES (*taking a chair*). Why not a pioneer?

JANE. We hope you'll find the climate bearable. We were very few at first, only Mazzini and I, but we grow, Mr. Milnes, we grow like an American state. (*She looks again*

at Lady Harriet.) We shall brave the mother country some day.

MILNES. The Americas have some delightful products.

JANE. You are thinking of Mr. Emerson. That man is so good a picture that it is a pity that he is a man. I always wanted to frame him and set him above the mantelpiece.

MAZZINI. It would be an altarpiece, then.

JANE. That is better than my husband's phrase. Carlyle says of him that he sheds light.

BULLER. Where did he get his light?

MILNES. You aren't looking for any, are you, Buller?

BULLER. Not just that kind. It wouldn't help the gloom of Parliament. But where did he get his light? I have always fancied that he filled that pretty agate lamp of his from an overflowing oil well at Craigenputtock. You know about that, Mrs. Carlyle.

JANE. He borrowed the oil perhaps, but the fragrance is his own.

MILNES. That is it—the fragrance. You feel somehow that incense is always rising from him.

JANE (*after an appreciative pause*). Richard Milnes, there are times when I forgive people for thinking you intelligent.

MILNES. We all rise above ourselves now and then. Mrs. Carlyle is sometimes charitable.

JANE. (*satirical again*). When I rise above myself, Mr. Milnes, I have the grace to relapse. But when you are chidden for wit, you repeat the offense—indelicately.

MILNES. Indelicately? I don't see that.

JANE. It is always indelicate to outshine one's neighbors.

MILNES (*unguardedly eager*). I'm not the only one. (*The company laugh.*)

JANE. Confession at last.

LADY HARRIET (*from across the room*). What are you people laughing at?

JANE. Mr. Milnes has begun to confess his superiorities. We shall have occupation for the whole day.

LADY HARRIET. I advise you to stop at once, Mr. Milnes. Those are the only confessions for which your friends will never absolve you.

MILNES. Mrs. Carlyle has made that quite clear.

JANE. Never mind, Mr. Milnes. I am off by the half past eleven. I go and leave my character behind me.

MILNES. You leave a husband behind you to defend it.

JANE. You remind me of an interesting fact. I have a husband. A husband always defends the wife who has gone away. Out of mere gratitude—*were there nothing else.* (*The company recognize a phrase of Carlyle's and the laughter is general.*)

CARLYLE (*who has heard imperfectly*). Woman! Woman!

JANE (*feigning to whisper*). What names he calls me!

CARLYLE. Jeannie, woman!

JANE (*mimicking a corrected housemaid*). Sir!

CARLYLE (*quite beaten by the laughter which ensues*). Gang your ways, hizzie. Ye hae too many abettors in your wickedness. It's nae guid, marryin' em. It's like holdin' Ireland. The mair ye have her, the less she minds ye. (*Tennyson rises with an incidental air and strolls over to the group on the left.*)

JANE. Mr. Tennyson, you are a loiterer. You should have come to us in our destitution.

TENNYSON. I wanted to come.

JANE. You are punished for your delay. The only seat now available is this one beside me, which Mr. Milnes and Mr. Buller and Mr. Mildmay have carefully avoided. Mazzini is on my other side, but he's a revolutionist and likes adventure.

TENNYSON (*seating himself*). I like adventure, too.

JANE (*looking at the other group*). There's only one person

left to capture. I should like to annex Mr. Baring. Mr. Carlyle, of course, doesn't count.

MILNES. Why doesn't Mr. Carlyle count?

JANE. A husband is not amenable to capture. If he were— (*She leaves the sentence unfinished.*)

MILNES. I suppose he'd be the supreme conquest.

JANE. Yes, the supreme conquest, Mr. Milnes—the conquest of impossibility. The least attractive woman in the company —to say nothing of the Lady Harriets—can hold the husband against the wife.

TENNYSON. Are you sure of that?

JANE. Sure of it? The proof of it is that at this very moment Mr. Baring is getting up and coming over to talk to me. I say "me" because I refuse to believe that so sane a gentleman is coming over to talk to—Mr. Buller.

BULLER. He's sane enough to follow my example. (*Jane rises to greet Baring, a grave and courtly man of middle age, essentially modest, but with a slight pomp of station beneath which his inherent modesty is uncomfortable.*)

BARING. Mrs. Carlyle, Lady Harriet and I are very sorry that you insist upon leaving us this morning.

JANE. You are most kind, Mr. Baring, and I am very sorry to go. But Cheyne Row is insistent—even more so than Addiscombe. I am leaving my husband behind to tell you how sorry I am I cannot stay, too.

BARING. That does not console Lady Harriet and me for your departure, glad as we are to keep Mr. Carlyle.

JANE (*taking the seat which Baring, by a courtly gesture, has invited her to resume, and speaking with much apparent sincerity*). I am very glad to leave Mr. Carlyle in such excellent and friendly hands. There are very few places where his contentment is even probable. Addiscombe is one.

BARING. We are sorry that you will not add to his contentment and ours—our happiness, I would say (*he is un-*

duly troubled by the trifling inadvertence)—by staying with us.

JANE. You are both very kind.

BULLER (*who has fetched another chair*). Sit down, Baring. You shan't miss the last minutes of Mrs. Carlyle's society. Go on, Mrs. Carlyle. Give Mr. Baring some of those little stabs you've been showering on Milnes and me. The only decent thing you can do now is to prove that your malignity is impartial. (*The action in this quarter is carried on for some minutes in dumb show, while the centre of interest shifts to the other end of the room, where Lady Harriet and Carlyle are left in somewhat obvious intimacy in the farthest recess of the bow-window.*)

LADY HARRIET (*impetuously*). Your wife is a superb woman.

CARLYLE (*tranquilly*). Men have fared worse in this tickle gear of matrimony.

LADY HARRIET. I could not find a fault in her, except that I dream sometimes that she has lost a little—a very little—of the first edge of her appreciation of you.

CARLYLE (*with a twinkle*). There's edge enough.

LADY HARRIET. That is your admirable comedy. Nothing will convince me that your married life is not radiant—consummate.

CARLYLE. There's nae question of convincing. If it weren't —what was that braw word ye used?—consummate, ye'd have to find that out for yourself. Oh, I don't doubt that ye could. Ye're sharp enough. (*A burst of laughter from the other end of the room draws the eyes of both momentarily to Jane.*)

LADY HARRIET. She holds them all.

CARLYLE. The lass has a spike at the end of her tongue. I wouldna have the spike removed. I should miss the glint on it.

LADY HARRIET. That is what I envy you. You understand each other perfectly.

CARLYLE. Fairly weel, fairly weel. Barrin' the fact that she is a woman, which is a sore disadvantage, and that I am a man, which is a sorer, and that the kind God put a bit of the devil into both of us—doubtless for the furtherance of our mutual understanding—Jeannie and I get on cannily enough. From year's end to year's end it works out not so badly. (*He pauses, then adds reflectively.*) There's room for many things in a year.

LADY HARRIET. There's room for reality in your year—not in mine.

CARLYLE (*disobligingly*). Like enough.

LADY HARRIET. I want reality, Mr. Carlyle.

CARLYLE (*whose eyes have been passingly drawn to his wife by another burst of merriment in the distance*). Jane would say, "Don't you wish you may get it?"

LADY HARRIET (*imperiously*). Never mind what Jane would say.

CARLYLE (*with sudden energy*). Mind what I say, then. Realities are no stuff for you. You are a noble seeming, set aloft, majestical, like Artemis on a frieze, worthy of all men's eyes. But for the doing and the being, for the bread-baking and the bairn-bearing, the first hard-knuckled lass in Dumfries that can barely spell her own name is worth scores of ye. Stay on your frieze, woman, beautiful to men's sight, and let the poor old world's eyes get what good they may of your grace and queenliness. Let that content you, if there's strength in you to be content; and, if that be not granted ye, be dumb.

LADY HARRIET (*a little shaken, but on the whole more pleased at having evoked the cataract than startled by its vehemence*). Mr. Carlyle, you are the first of men, but I will not be thrust out of my rights as a human being, because I am a peer's daughter and may be a peer's wife some day. I hold my own with any milkmaid.

CARLYLE (*grimly*). Except in the milkin'.

LADY HARRIET (*with great good-humor*). Come, you shall talk to me, you masterful farmer's son. Tell me what will put meaning, substance, into my life.

CARLYLE (*abruptly concise*). Study German.

LADY HARRIET. I have told you already that I have no time for learning languages.

CARLYLE. No—only time for putting substance into your life. Ye'll do that while ye're putting on your gloves nae doubt.

LADY HARRIET. That is a petty gibe, sir. Let me tell you that it takes a long time to do nothing.

CARLYLE (*drily*). I have observed that.

LADY HARRIET. The hardest drudgery is drudging at frivolities.

CARLYLE. It's hard work—digging with a feather. I grant ye that.

LADY HARRIET. A man like you doesn't realize the extent to which a life can be empty—and yet crowded.

CARLYLE. And why can I not? Any dolt can see that an empty box—or an empty head, for that matter—takes up as much room as a full one.

LADY HARRIET. You shall not escape me. I don't want metaphors—not even *your* metaphors. I want counsel, definite counsel.

CARLYLE (*abruptly concise again*). Keep a diary.

LADY HARRIET. A diary?

CARLYLE (*his eye attracted to his wife by renewed laughter in the distance*). You know all the spangles, all the nobodies. Keep a diary. Some day the historian of human folly will be thankful to ye.

LADY HARRIET. I see your drift. You want provender for another Carlyle. There will be no other.

CARLYLE. I do not know that. There might be one honest man in the twentieth century.

LADY HARRIET (*with a deprecatory gesture*). I can't pin life to a page. I am too impatient.

CARLYLE. Like enough.

LADY HARRIET (*a little sharply*). Give me some advice that I can take.

CARLYLE. There are only two sorts of advice for a fine woman: the advice that is good for nothing, and the advice that she will not take.

LADY HARRIET. Mr. Carlyle, I am a very long-suffering woman; I wish sometimes that I were back in the feudal ages when a woman in my position could have ordered forty lashes for a man in yours.

CARLYLE. Ye would have been a great lady at any time; but (*he looks at her curiously*) I doubt if I should have cared to see the backs of your bondsmen.

LADY HARRIET. Churl! (*She stamps her foot, then laughs, then holds out her hand.*)

CARLYLE (*taking the hand warmly*). There are times when I'm nae so sure that ye arena a great woman, too. (*Lady Harriet and Carlyle converse for some minutes in dumb show.*)

JANE CARLYLE. Oh, these differences between husband and wife are much exaggerated. A wife is a convenience; a husband is an inconvenience; it is only the difference of a prefix.

MILNES. You should be the last person to say that, Mrs. Carlyle.

JANE. And why, Mr. Milnes?

MILNES. You who have married into the firmament, so to speak!

JANE. Into the firmament! How delightful! (*In a stage whisper to Tennyson.*) Is he thinking of the Great Bear?

BARING (*seriously*). It seems strange that anyone should know Carlyle well enough to say that.

JANE (*respectfully*). Use and wont, Mr. Baring—it works marvels.

MILNES. Even at a distance the thought of use and wont in relation to genius seems almost paradoxical, and when one

thinks of living like Mrs. Carlyle day after day with the paradox at one's elbow— (*He pauses to measure the idea.*)

JANE. Oh, one takes the genius in sections, Mr. Milnes. He takes himself in sections. That's his recipe for living.

MILNES. I suppose in a less degree there's the same confusion in all of us. It's a long road from our toothpicks to our prayer-books.

BULLER. Yes, if we read our prayer-books. Tennyson, how do you reconcile the Muses to your pipe?

TENNYSON. They seem to like it.

MILNES. Considering the fact that the Muses are ladies and that they were brought up in Greece, where nobody smoked, they have an astonishing indulgence for tobacco.

JANE. That reminds me that, since Mr. Tennyson has been sitting by me, I have been visited by hallucinations in my nose. I have dreamt of odors from the spicy shore of Araby the Blest—or what shore is it, Mr. Tennyson? If Lady Harriet's eye were not upon me, I should certainly investigate the contents of this pocket next me.

TENNYSON. The pocket would be grateful.

JANE. No, Mr. Tennyson, Lady Harriet would not approve. I renounce the satisfaction of my curiosity—unless, indeed, Mr. Buller—

BULLER. By all means. (*He reaches across and draws from Tennyson's pocket a well-browned meerschaum-pipe.*)

JANE (*much interested*). Is that all?

BULLER. There's his tobacco-pouch.

JANE. Give them to me, Mr. Buller. (*She takes the pipe and pouch with affected daintiness.*) It's really too tempting —all the necessities in one's hands at once. (*She begins to fill the pipe.*)

BULLER. Shan't I do that for you?

JANE. Thank you, I know how to fill pipes. Though I have married into the firmament, as Mr. Milnes so charmingly suggests, it is a London firmament and very smoky. (*She sur-*

veys the filled bowl.) It lacks something. Mr. Buller, have you a match? I was sure you had. (*She applies to the tobacco the match which Buller has lighted and put into her hand.*) Look at that smoke. I can almost see little wisps of the *Day-Dream* and rings from the *Lyrical Monologue* floating in it. Open your mouth, Mr. Tennyson. (*She puts the pipe into Tennyson's mouth. Murmurs of amusement in the group alternate with cautious glances toward Lady Harriet.*)

LADY HARRIET (*sniffing*). Who is smoking? Mr. Tennyson, you surprise me. Poets are kings at Addiscombe, but even kings obey the law of the house. You might at least have respected—Mrs. Carlyle's presence. (*At this everybody laughs.*)

TENNYSON (*removing the pipe from his mouth*). The woman tempted me and I did—smoke.

JANE. The man was in Paradise. You can see that by his excuses.

LADY HARRIET (*severely*). Mrs. Carlyle!

JANE. Yes, Lady Harriet.

LADY HARRIET. You are fairly riotous this morning.

JANE. I belong to the mob, you know.

LADY HARRIET. Mr. Tennyson, you are forgiven—that is, if you don't repeat the offense. When the persuasions of tobacco are added to the seductions of woman, man is helpless between two sirens.

TENNYSON. If you please, Lady Harriet—

LADY HARRIET. Well?

TENNYSON. I should like to keep all the blame to myself—if you don't mind.

LADY HARRIET. Keep it by all means. We grudge you nothing, Mr. Tennyson, in our house.

JANE. No, I will not be absolved at Mr. Tennyson's expense. Alfred, give me that pipe. (*She takes the unextinguished*

pipe from Tennyson's hand and deliberately applies her mouth to the stem. Sensation.)

LADY HARRIET (*this time almost genuinely angry*). Mr. Baring, you are the master in this house. Will you ask Mrs. Carlyle to put aside that pipe?

BARING. I beg your pardon, my dear, but it seems to me that my being the master of the house should make me the servant of its guests.

LADY HARRIET. Is his name Baring or forbearing? Mr. Carlyle, will you discipline your wife?

CARLYLE (*who has hugely enjoyed the pipe episode*). Ask the possible, Madam.

LADY HARRIET (*still resourceful*). Mr. Tennyson, at my earnest entreaty, you will have the goodness to remove your pipe from the mouth of Mrs. Carlyle.

TENNYSON. Lady Harriet, I don't quite see myself snatching any article of mine from a friend who is using it.

JANE. What shall he do with it, Lady Harriet, if he takes it from me?

LADY HARRIET. Anything he likes.

JANE. Mr. Tennyson, smoke your own pipe.

TENNYSON (*taking the pipe*). I have your permission, Lady Harriet?

LADY HARRIET. Do anything except return the pipe to Mrs. Carlyle.

TENNYSON (*in apology to the company*). I smoke in the drawing-room at Cheyne Row.

LADY HARRIET (*resenting the comparison*). You are at Addiscombe, Mr. Tennyson.

MILNES (*slightly turning toward Jane*). Cheyne Row is powerful even here.

LADY HARRIET (*with a leonine glance at Jane Carlyle*). Powerful, Richard Milnes? You mean *sovereign.* (*Footman enters, right, and approaches Lady Harriet.*)

FOOTMAN. The housekeeper asks to see you, my lady.

LADY HARRIET (*instantly resuming her regal suavity*). Excuse me for a moment. (*To Carlyle, whom she evidently wishes to detain in the bow-window*). I will be back instantly, Mr. Carlyle. (*She goes out, right.*)

JANE (*whose chair is so placed that she cannot see Carlyle, whispering to Mazzini*). Is he stirring, Mazzini?

MAZZINI. Who?

JANE. Carlyle.

MAZZINI. No.

JANE. Immovable. I knew it. He is waiting for her to come back.

MILNES. Mrs. Carlyle, you have defended poetry against power. Tennyson should write you a lyric.

JANE. Impossible, Mr. Milnes. Tennyson was not foreseen when I was born, and my parents had the heartlessness to name me Jane.

BULLER. Jane is a good name.

MILDMAY. Better than most. A man can spell it.

JANE. Oh, Jane is good cobblestone, Mr. Mildmay, but it doesn't fit into Mr. Tennyson's mosaic.

MAZZINI (*to Jane*). He is getting up.

JANE. We shall win yet, Mazzini. (*Carlyle has risen, and slowly makes his way toward the group at the left. The impulse that brings Jane to her feet is reflected in the entire company, who form instinctively a kind of lane through which Carlyle, with whimsical deliberation, advances toward his wife.*)

CARLYLE. Well, Jeannie?

JANE. Yes, Thomas.

CARLYLE. The de'il's been in you this morning.

JANE. Yes, Thomas. He likes the places he is used to.

CARLYLE. Ay, ay, the places where he is made much of. Is it from him that ye get your damnable proclivity for smoke?

JANE. From him, Thomas, I think—or from some of his associates. (*She looks meaningly at her husband.*)

LADY HARRIET (*entering, right, and approaching Jane*). Mrs. Carlyle, I am very sorry to see the end of a visit which Mr. Baring and I have thoroughly enjoyed, but the carriage is at the door, and I fear that no time is to be lost if you insist upon leaving by the half past eleven.

JANE. Lady Harriet, the happiest visits must come to an end, and I have the most urgent reasons for getting back to Chelsea. (*Various salutations.*)

LADY HARRIET. If you would like to say goodbye to Mr. Carlyle in your own room—

JANE. No, no, the front steps will do perfectly well. We shall edify all the lady's-maids by the sobriety of our endearments.

CARLYLE (*quietly*). I'm going with you, Jane.

LADY HARRIET (*thunderstruck*). But, Mr. Carlyle, you were to stay with us.

CARLYLE (*genially*). Some other time, some other time. Don't you see that the creature's clean daft and not fit to be trusted in the street by herself? She'd be run over by the first omnibus in Soho, and, mad as the quean is, I should miss her. (*Jane, glancing through her dropped eyelashes at Lady Harriet's face, bends her head in a pose of meek surprise and deprecating humility. Lady Harriet, shaken by the blow, recovers herself gallantly, and speaks in the tone of royalty at bay.*)

LADY HARRIET. Any reasons which grow out of concern for Mrs. Carlyle are conclusive for Mr. Baring and myself. We are grateful beyond words for all that you have given us.

CURTAIN

THE UNDYING PRINCE

CHARACTERS

SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON
E. H. SOTHERN
WALTER HAMPDEN
JOHN BARRYMORE
SIR HENRY IRVING
EDWIN BOOTH
DAVID GARRICK
THOMAS BETTERTON
RICHARD BURBAGE
THE GUEST WITHOUT A NAME

WAITER

The action takes place in a private dining-room on the second story of the Tongs and Poker, an ancient London inn. The date is contemporary and the hours are from two to four in the morning. The room is rather low, favors oak in its furniture, wainscoting, and panels, and exhales a marked savor of antiquity. There are folding doors at the back, a deep fireplace with two unlighted logs at the right, a high antique cabinet to the right of the folding doors, and a door down stage left which opens on the corridor. A triangle which fills about one-third of the stage to the back and to the left is occupied by seven small square dining-tables on which, after the removal of the food, glasses, tankards, and ash-trays are still seen in agreeable disorder. The floor-space to the right and front is checkered only by roomy and inviting easy-chairs four or five of which are grouped in an irregular and broken arc to which the fireplace serves as center. The light of the tall candles on the tables and on the mantelpiece above the fireplace is supplemented by electric burners carefully masked in various places on the walls.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. Almost immediately the door at the left opens, and E. H. Sothern enters, followed by Walter Hampden, John Barrymore, and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. Arrived in the room, they face each other with looks of mutual inquiry.

SOTHERN (*genially*). Well, what are we here for?

HAMPDEN (*indicating Barrymore*). Ask Jack.

BARRYMORE (*to Sothern*). Don't you know?

SOTHERN. I haven't the ghost of an idea.

HAMPDEN. It comes round to Forbes, then. Forbes, why are we here?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Gentlemen, you wrong me. I merely followed the others.

SOTHERN. Forbes was behind us, Walter.

HAMPDEN. That's where the pusher always is.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I assure you that when I went down stairs I meant to take a cab and go away with the other guests.

BARRYMORE. We all meant that. (*Appealing to Sothern.*) Didn't we?

SOTHERN. *I* did. I'm waiting to be told why I'm here.

BARRYMORE. If each of us pleads not guilty, the only scapegoat is—

HAMPDEN. Name him.

BARRYMORE. All of us.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That's—that's amusing, isn't it?

BARRYMORE. Frightening, I think. A common impulse—perceived by none of us.

SOTHERN. Nonsense, Jack. The sub-conscious is all the fashion.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Too much the fashion, don't you think? One doesn't altogether like this fellow in the cellarage.

BARRYMORE. Cellarage! The very word. It's as if our four minds had cellars and the cellars opened into one another—

HAMPDEN. Without informing the ground-floors.

SOTHERN (*thoughtfully*). But why among the four of us—just us?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. We're all four—Hamlets.

BARRYMORE. You think *he* brought us back?

SOTHERN. He? Who?

BARRYMORE (*almost timidly*). Hamlet. (*All three look curiously at Barrymore.*) I don't want to be a fool—

SOTHERN. Nobody does, Jack. It's a visitation of Providence.

BARRYMORE. Listen a moment. There is this relation of all four of us to Hamlet. Why shouldn't that relation be the —meeting-place—

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The—as it were—secret rendezvous—

BARRYMORE. Thank you, Sir Johnston. Where—where the minds of all four of us met without knowing it.

SOTHERN (*half benignly, half chaffingly*). I don't know whether you're turning into a poet, Jack, or a lunatic.

HAMPDEN. The distinction in our time is very abstruse. (*Addressing Barrymore.*) You think, then, that we have a common soul and that that soul is Hamlet?

BARRYMORE. Something like that.

HAMPDEN. But why did this common soul show itself just now?

BARRYMORE. After the Hamlet dinner? Why not?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. With all our thoughts—*converging*—

BARRYMORE. If such a thing could be, to-night would be its opportunity.

SOTHERN. Gentlemen, I suggest that the spirit that has called us together will not mind our sitting down. I have no reason to think that he dislikes the odor of tobacco. I suggest that we make ourselves comfortable and await overtures from what was it, Forbes?—the cellarage. (*Sothern and Hampden seat themselves; Barrymore and Forbes-Robertson are about to do likewise when a slight sound is heard from behind the folding-doors.*)

BARRYMORE. What was that?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*moving upstage a little*). It's the clink of glasses. There is a party in the next room.

BARRYMORE. A party? There was nobody there during the dinner.

SOTHERN. How do you know?

BARRYMORE. If there was anybody, they were preternaturally quiet. You sat next the door, Walter. Did you hear anything?

HAMPDEN. Not a sound. I'm sure the room was empty.

SOTHERN. Very well. They have come in since.

HAMPDEN. At two o'clock?

SOTHERN. Why not at two o'clock? Your innocence, Walter, is angelic.

HAMPDEN. I yield, Sothern. Innocence in any old companion of yours is certainly discreditable.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. There's nothing unusual in the hour. The place is a little out of the way—that is all. (*He and Barrymore sit down; the group is loosely disposed about the fireplace.*)

SOTHERN. It's a delicious old inn. How did you happen to unearth it, Forbes?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Phelps—Samuel Phelps—pointed it out to me. It's an actors' inn. And it's old.

SOTHERN. The old inns are charming. The past rises to their surface—like a cream.

HAMPDEN. We don't allow metaphors at two o'clock in the morning, Sothern.

SOTHERN. Very well, Walter. This inn is a lovable old place, and I enjoy its very mildew. You follow me?

HAMPDEN. Perfectly, thanks. Has it a reputation, Forbes?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*hesitatingly*). It has—as you might say —a reputation—for *obscurity*.

SOTHERN. Capital! How old is it?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. 1690, they say.

HAMPDEN. They say?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*very gently*). I think legend has—has assisted time a little.

HAMPDEN. That is always the way. Nothing ages like age.

SOTHERN. How about epigram at two A. M., Walter?

HAMPDEN. Epigram will wake you up.

SOTHERN. That is precisely the favor which at two o'clock I could dispense with.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*experimentally*). There's another legend —very curious. (*He looks around.*) I am not sure that it should be confided to—Americans.

HAMPDEN. My dear Forbes, Americans are reticence itself.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Oh, it's not a secret. The point is if you could keep from laughing.

BARRYMORE. Try us.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. They say the inn can not be seen by daylight. (*A pause. Sothern whistles.*) It isn't true of course.

SOTHERN (*with extreme gravity*). Of course not.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I've seen it in broad day myself.

HAMPDEN. But what started such a legend?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The inn is very—very secretive. Its front is only six feet from the next building and the passage is rather dark. I suppose people looked for it and missed it and so the story got afloat. It's something London keeps, as it were, in its inside waistcoat pocket.

BARRYMORE. That's a delightful legend.

SOTHERN. Gentlemen, in the interest of our common sanity, I suggest an immediate change of subject. We had a very pleasant dinner to-night.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The occasion was unique.

BARRYMORE. The Danish prince didn't seem to know just what it was all about.

HAMPDEN. He enjoyed his dinner.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That's the first virtue in a prince, isn't it? It's a—a security for the subject.

SOTHERN. Not in a democracy, Forbes.

HAMPDEN. Where the people is king, the great point is that it should enjoy its dinner.

BARRYMORE. It doesn't.

HAMPDEN. Quite true, and its bile is named radicalism.

SOTHERN. Let politics rest, Walter. We are on literature tonight.

BARRYMORE. The Danish prince was a little dull, but I thought the ambassador—where he said that through Hamlet England and Denmark had made each other illustrious—I thought that good.

SOTHERN. He's a very decent fellow. He seemed rather surprised that you hadn't read Saxo, Jack.

BARRYMORE. Oh, I keep surprises of that kind on tap for all my acquaintances.

SOTHERN. Quite right. I like an undaunted ignorance. What is it, Forbes?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*listening*). They are having a good time in there. (*Glasses clink from behind the double doors.*)

SOTHERN. Very presuming of them, Forbes, but we can't help it.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I know, but at this hour and here—it is peculiar.

HAMPDEN. You don't think they are ghosts, do you? Do ghosts drink, Sothern?

SOTHERN. One of my Hamlet ghosts died of it.

BARRYMORE. The place *has* its ghosts, hasn't it, Sir Johnston?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Hardly. It's been used by actors mostly.

BARRYMORE. Why shouldn't an actor have a ghost?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*with his deferential hesitation*). For the same reason, I suppose, that a shadow doesn't have a shadow.

HAMPDEN. Hamlet said it did.

BARRYMORE. It wasn't Hamlet that said that. It was his schoolfellows.

SOTHERN. Jack has read the play.

BARRYMORE. *Do* actors have no ghosts?

SOTHERN. One never hears of them. I wonder why.

HAMPDEN. How about this for a reason: They aren't real enough in their own persons, and in their impersonations they are too various?

SOTHERN. Very shrewd. I am proud of you, Walter.

HAMPDEN. Why *proud?*

SOTHERN. Oh, in a fatherly way.

HAMPDEN. I don't feel the least bit filial.

SOTHERN. What son does?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But to get back to the ghost—

SOTHERN. Must we get back to the ghost? I thought Walter had laid him.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I think Walter is right in saying that an actor is the ghost of many characters.

SOTHERN. A syndicated ghost, so to speak.

BARRYMORE. Hush, Sothern.

HAMPDEN. On the other hand, the same character would have many ghosts. All four of us are Hamlets.

SOTHERN. This conversation is delightfully instructive. I begin to see why all four of us take so kindly to mad parts.

BARRYMORE. All four of us Hamlets. It's a strange bond.

HAMPDEN. Live men—real men—bound together by a figment.

BARRYMORE. A figment? I call Hamlet supremely alive.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Good!

HAMPDEN. He's only a thought.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. He's a live thought.

HAMPDEN. Alive in us—not in Hamlet. We *are*. *He isn't.*

SOTHERN. To be or not to be.

BARRYMORE. What's being anyhow? A toad can be.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. If a toad, why not Hamlet?

HAMPDEN. If a toad, why Hamlet?

BARRYMORE. He is our life when we act him.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. And the life—isn't he—of all who feel with us?

BARRYMORE. He does that for ages. He's a reservoir of life.

SOTHERN. Poetry, Jack, poetry.

BARRYMORE. Call it poetry. Call it Shakespeare if you like. I could swallow even that insult.

SOTHERN. But, Jack, when you get to the point—we live without Hamlet. He doesn't live without us.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*musingly*). Who knows?

HAMPDEN. Knows what?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Listen a minute. It is hard to say, but he—Hamlet, I mean—is possible, isn't he? He might have been?

HAMPDEN. Certainly.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*slowly*). He might be.

HAMPDEN. Look here, Forbes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*with charming modesty*). Am I talking nonsense?

BARRYMORE. Not at all. Look here yourself, Walter. That group of traits that we call Hamlet is just as reasonable, just as possible, as the group of traits that calls itself John Barrymore or Walter Hampden.

SOTHERN. It might easily be as reasonable as one of the pair, Jack.

BARRYMORE. Sothern, you know that type in Shakespeare who is always interrupting the other characters with ill-timed pleasantries? You know the title Shakespeare gives him?

SOTHERN. Proceed, Jack. I am dumb.

BARRYMORE. Hamlet is a possibility. Thousands of possibilities become actual every day—by biological process?

HAMPDEN. Yes.

BARRYMORE. Why shouldn't one possibility become actual—through psychological process?

SOTHERN. To-morrow morning, Jack, you will be aghast at yourself.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. There are more things—

SOTHERN. The proverb is something musty, Forbes.

BARRYMORE. Musty as Shakespeare. Musty as Hamlet. Hamlet is an idea that has put on everything else, including immortality. Why shouldn't it put on reality?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The world yearns toward him, doesn't it? Why shouldn't that yearning be a—a suction—

HAMPDEN. A suction!

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Drawing him out of the dream-world into reality?

HAMPDEN. My brain swims, gentlemen.

SOTHERN. Mine doesn't even swim. It's drowned.

BARRYMORE. I know we seem like madmen to you, Sothern. But who can tell how close the unreal is to us? Who knows what may be on the other side of that partition? (*He points to the double door.*)

SOTHERN (*to Forbes-Robertson*). Is the door locked?

BARRYMORE (*to Forbes-Robertson, who has started for the double doors*). Don't disturb yourself, Sir Johnston. That is his brand of humor. But to go on—

SOTHERN. I beg your pardon, Jack. Are you resuming this topic?

BARRYMORE. For one minute, Sothern. Please forgive me. (*Sothern resigns himself.*) When one thinks of all the actors —from Shakespeare's time on—who have poured their life into Hamlet, Hamlet becomes a bank, a deposit, of life. Why shouldn't he—the Prince himself—draw upon that deposit?

HAMPDEN. I wonder if they have bank books in Hades. Hamlet's autograph on a check would be priceless.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Speaking of autographs, there are some relics in that cabinet—signed photographs of Kemble and Macready as Hamlet—and other things. Should you like to see them?

SOTHERN. By all means. (*Barrymore and Hampden assent eagerly.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I borrowed a key from the landlord. (*He opens the cabinet.*) There's the Kemble photograph, and there's the Macready—I'm wrong, that's the Spranger-Barry. (*He passes the relics to the other three, who have*

joined him in front of the cabinet.) And here are some Garrick programs—Hamlet, Lear, other things.

HAMPDEN. They look like our gallery programs in New York.

SOTHERN. The gallery programs are the only decent ones in the house. They give the facts and stop.

BARRYMORE. What's that musical thing?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That's the recorder used by Samuel Phelps in the talk after the play-scene. Here are the knots that tied John Kemble's shoes, and this is the sheath of Charles Kean's rapier.

SOTHERN. Where's the rapier itself?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Gone, I suppose.

BARRYMORE. There's a book. What is it?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That's the book used by David Garrick where Hamlet enters reading.

HAMPDEN. By Jove! Florio's Montaigne!

SOTHERN. Really? Why do I never have a real book, a book fit for Hamlet, in that scene?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. This is the napkin which Edwin Booth took from the queen in the fencing-scene.

BARRYMORE. Pleasant to find that here.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. And this is the Yorick's skull used by Irving in the graveyard scene. (*The skull is passed around.*)

HAMPDEN (*in a slightly lowered voice*). Very interesting.

SOTHERN. A little gruesome—at this hour—by candlelight.

BARRYMORE. It's the perfect hour and the only light. All the superstitions vanished with the candles.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Perhaps they'll come back with them.

SOTHERN. After my time, I trust. Ah, what is that?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*in alarm*). Don't drop it, Sothern! (*He takes the skull from Sothern and replaces it with the other relics in the cabinet.*)

SOTHERN. I heard something—from the other room. That was all. (*All four listen.*)

BARRYMORE. They are singing.

HAMPDEN. That's normal enough.

SOTHERN. What are they singing?

HAMPDEN. I don't know. Some drinking-catch, I suppose. Why do you want to know?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I think we are all curious. Mr. Hampden, your hearing is somewhat better than mine—

HAMPDEN. Do you want me to listen at the keyhole?

SOTHERN. Don't be nice, Walter. The Prince of Wales took purses once in his life, you know.

HAMPDEN. For once, then. (*He goes to the double doors, stoops, and listens. When he turns, his look is grave.*)

THE OTHERS. Well?

HAMPDEN (*striving for unconcern*). It's nothing really; only it's a little odd.

BARRYMORE. What is odd?

HAMPDEN. What they are singing.

SOTHERN. Well?

HAMPDEN (*repeating the words in a very low voice*).

> Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
> The hart ungalled play;
> For some must watch, while some must sleep:
> So runs the world away.

(*Barrymore and Sothern start; Forbes-Robertson remains unaffected.*)

BARRYMORE. Strange!

FORBES-ROBERTSON. What is that from?

SOTHERN (*trying to master anxiety with humor*). That, Forbes, is a song from a play called Hamlet, played to the admiration of two continents by Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, whose name you have seen in the newspapers.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*apologetically*). Don't lay it on with a trowel, Sothern. A bit like that out of its place. I

shouldn't know my own finger-nail, I suppose, if I saw it in a case in an anatomical museum.

SOTHERN. I beg your pardon, Forbes. It was very rude of me. (*He looks around.*) Who can be singing that?

HAMPDEN. Not ordinary drinking-parties surely.

BARRYMORE. But Sir Johnston says it is actors mostly who come here.

SOTHERN. Ordinary actors don't sing catches from Hamlet. I never heard that song off-stage. Did you? (*He turns to Hampden.*)

HAMPDEN. No. But it doesn't matter. It's probably a mere nothing. The reasons that you can't guess are usually disappointingly commonplace.

SOTHERN. And humiliatingly obvious. (*A slight pause.*) I should like to know who they are. I suppose (*he hesitates*) —we might send for the landlord. (*Silence.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*meditatively*). Would that be quite—decent—before they've done anything offensive?

SOTHERN. You are right. They've conducted themselves as properly as we have.

HAMPDEN. I presume they haven't listened at our keyhole.

BARRYMORE. They can't be very cheerful.

HAMPDEN. Why not?

BARRYMORE. Why, that song, the "stricken deer" one, is as dreary as anything in Hamlet.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. It's a sad part.

HAMPDEN. It's weighted with sadness. Other characters reach your heart; Hamlet gets into your entrails.

BARRYMORE. Do you mean you're unhappy while you're playing him?

HAMPDEN. Jack, that's a heartless question. Really unhappy, no—only when I play him to empty houses—or to empty heads.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. You don't feel sad, then?

HAMPDEN. Yes, I am sad, and I wheedle myself into thinking

that I am very sad indeed, but if anything really tragic happened to me while I was acting, that sadness would disappear like smoke.

BARRYMORE. What do you mean by something really tragic happening to you on the stage?

HAMPDEN. Forgetting my lines.

SOTHERN. A man can't suffer—*really*—when he is doing his own work well.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. He can't quite lose himself.

HAMPDEN. There's a great contradiction between a tragedian's problem and his circumstances.

SOTHERN. Ask him to explain, Jack. He is pausing—for a question.

BARRYMORE. Tell us, Walter. I *do* want to know.

HAMPDEN. His problem is to merge his own consciousness in another's, and he has to solve that problem on a platform before a multitude,—that is, in the setting which multiplies self-consciousness.

SOTHERN. Very true. The double self—that explains the cheerfulness of tragedians.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Are they cheerful?

SOTHERN. Tragedians? They are as cheerful as undertakers.

BARRYMORE. Are you serious?

SOTHERN. I am always serious, Jack, in my allusions to undertakers.

BARRYMORE. We might compare them—the tragedians, I mean—to the clowns in the graveyard scene, laughing as they toss up the skulls.

SOTHERN. Good enough, except that we don't quite laugh. We only smile profusely on the hilarious audience. . . .

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Of course a man is glad to succeed, but Hamlet is a sad part.

HAMPDEN. Yes, it's more than tragic; it's—painful. (*The others smile a little.*)

BARRYMORE. The sorrow is a load.

SOTHERN. Yes, with Macbeth and Lear it's a goad and that's easier. (*From the double doors a sudden short firm knock is heard; silence follows; then comes a series of short firm knocks. The four actors start.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Good heavens!

BARRYMORE. They're knocking.

SOTHERN. What can they want of us?

HAMPDEN. Anything—matches perhaps. A knock is nothing.

BARRYMORE. This is exciting. Shall we open?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Impossible. The door is locked—I'm quite sure it is— (*He walks to the doors and verifies his certainty.*)

SOTHERN. You haven't a key?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. No.

BARRYMORE. We can send for the waiter.

SOTHERN. Do we want to send for the waiter? (*The four look at each other. Another series of short firm knocks is heard.*)

BARRYMORE. They want us.

HAMPDEN. We must get to the bottom of this. We aren't babies.

SOTHERN. The top is all I want.

HAMPDEN. These knocks are worse than anything they can mean. (*A pause.*) Shall I ring the bell, Forbes?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*after some hesitation*). Please do. (*Hampden touches a button, then approaches the double doors.*)

HAMPDEN (*speaking to the persons within*). Gentlemen, we ask you to be patient for a moment. The door is locked and we have sent for the key.

SOTHERN. No answer?

HAMPDEN. Nothing.

BARRYMORE. They *have* voices.

SOTHERN. In their dealings with us they seem to prefer fists. That is what worries me. (*Waiter enters by door left.*)

WAITER. Gentlemen rang?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Waiter, you have a key to that door? (*He points to the double doors.*)

WAITER. Yes, sir.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Will you open it, please? The party in there wish to speak to us.

WAITER (*respectfully*). There's no party in that room tonight, sir.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. No party? But we all heard them.

WAITER. The room is rented by a club, sir. The Club's had it for many years, and they hardly ever meet. Not once a year.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. What club?

WAITER. I don't recall the name exactly. It's an odd name. The El—El—Els—

BARRYMORE (*eagerly*). Not Elsinore?

WAITER. Elsinore! The Elsinore Club. That's it, sir.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The Elsinore Club. (*The four actors look at each other.*)

HAMPDEN. That explains one thing—why they want to see *us*.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Yes. Waiter, we—we have an acquaintance with Elsinore.

WAITER (*very respectfully*). A lady, sir?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. No, not exactly.

WAITER (*if possible, still more respectfully*). Ah, they're not all that, sir, more's the pity.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Your sentiments do you credit. And now perhaps you will unlock the door for us.

WAITER. Yes, sir. (*He takes out a bunch of keys, selects an old and rusty one, and, after inserting it in the lock, succeeds with effort in opening the door. He shoves back the other door. What the four actors see is a room with two tables, a larger central table on which bottles, glasses, and candles have*

been set, and a smaller table in the rear on which are a single candle and a single wineglass (the glass opaque). The room is absolutely empty of human beings. There is a door in the left side, opening, as we may suppose, upon the corridor. The four actors enter the room, followed by the waiter.)

WAITER (*with a discreet absence of triumph*). No one here, sir.

SOTHERN. They've gone.

HAMPDEN (*to the waiter, pointing to the door at left*). Does that door open into the corridor?

WAITER. Yes, sir.

HAMPDEN. See if it's locked.

WAITER (*after trying the door*). It's locked.

HAMPDEN. Do they have a key—the Club, I mean?

WAITER. No, sir.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. It's very strange. We all heard them.

WAITER. Gentlemen's hearing at three o'clock in the morning sometimes quite extraordinary, sir.

SOTHERN. My good fellow, we're not drunk.

WAITER (*shocked*). No indeed, sir.

SOTHERN. None of us drank much, and Sir Johnston here, whom I suppose you know, had only one glass of claret.

WAITER (*after bowing deferentially to Forbes-Robertson*). Very wise of him, I'm sure. I'm a temperate man myself. And I'm respectful, I hope, to my superiors. I was talking to Rufus, the other man, only the other day. "Rufus," I said, "gentlemen is frequently sober when they looks quite the contrary. When a gentleman says he's sober, he is sober. That's my view, Rufus," I said. "All very pretty," says Rufus, "but how about the facts?" "That's a very unintelligent remark, Rufus," I said—that was my word, sir, unintelligent. "What have facts," said I, "to do with gentlemen?"

SOTHERN (*laughing*). Quite right. Facts are the most ungentlemanly things I know.

HAMPDEN. But how do you account for the glasses and the candles?

WAITER (*after a moment's obvious perplexity*). Servants, sir, —they gets in everywhere.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*who prefers the edge of the inner room*). Are the glasses all empty?

HAMPDEN (*investigating*). Yes—and one of the bottles is uncorked. Wait a minute. (*He goes to the further table, and picks up the glass.*) This glass is full.

SOTHERN. There's no chair at that table.

WAITER. Servants don't sit down to drink; they hasn't time. (*The party, after a few dissatisfied glances, return to the outer room.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Close the door, waiter. (*Waiter obeys.*) You may go now, and if—if you should want to talk about this little matter to your friends (*impressive pause*),—*reconsider.* (*He gives the waiter a half-sovereign.*)

WAITER. Thank you, sir. I never talk. It's a bad habit. Effeminate, sir, effeminate—that's what I call it. (*He goes out by the door, left.*)

BARRYMORE. He thinks we're crazy.

SOTHERN. Jack disagrees with him. I wish I did.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Come, gentlemen, let us forget this—unpleasantness and sit down. (*They sit down one by one during the next few speeches.*)

BARRYMORE (*who has walked up to the double doors*). He left the key in the door. I suppose that's all right.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*rather nervously*). It's all right—*if it's turned.*

BARRYMORE (*trying it*). It's turned, Sir Johnston.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Thank you. What were we talking about before this—this chilly little episode? (*All four look blank.*) Something interesting, I remember.

SOTHERN. I always forget the interesting things.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Oh, yes. We were speaking of the

weight of the despair in Hamlet. I should like to hear more of that.

BARRYMORE (*with animation*). I had something on the tip of my tongue when that knock came.

SOTHERN. The knock was providential.

HAMPDEN. Hush, Sothern. Let Jack speak for once.

SOTHERN. By all means. Jack, speak—*for once.*

BARRYMORE. I have it. I meant to say that Hamlet is unlike all other tragic heroes in this—that when the play begins the disaster is complete.

HAMPDEN. What is that?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Did I understand you, Mr. Barrymore?

BARRYMORE. The other tragedies open cheerfully. Macbeth and Othello in splendor. Richard III in growing prosperity.

HAMPDEN. In Lear the opening is ominous.

BARRYMORE. Ominous perhaps, but not calamitous. Hamlet begins in moral death, death at the start. The rest is obsequy.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But surely the despair rises all the way through.

BARRYMORE. It doesn't.

HAMPDEN. Prove it.

BARRYMORE. Take the first lines of the first soliloquy in Act I: "O! that this too, too solid flesh would melt." That is Hamlet's despair—at its highest.

HAMPDEN. Steady, Jack.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*with entreaty*). No, no!

BARRYMORE. Find me the passage—I challenge you—in any later soliloquy—or speech—that comes near to that in the intensity of its despair.

SOTHERN. Refute him, Forbes—I cannot.

BARRYMORE. Everywhere else it's lighter; it's diluted with anger or raillery or thought. The despair in that first scene is pure.

HAMPDEN. But the great reason for his despair was unknown to him then.

BARRYMORE. What do you call the great reason?

HAMPDEN. His uncle's crime.

BARRYMORE. I should say his mother's.

HAMPDEN. You call that the greater horror?

BARRYMORE. With their views of incest, yes. Which one of us wouldn't feel his mother's defilement more than the murder of his father by his uncle?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. It's worse perhaps, but not so exciting. The interest mounts—mounts hugely, does it not?—when the Ghost tells Hamlet the truth.

SOTHERN. That revelation is the thunderbolt.

BARRYMORE. The interest mounts, yes, yes, I grant that—but not the despair. The despair is complete already. And as for Sothern's thunderbolt—

SOTHERN. Be gentle with it, Jack. Thunderbolts are sensitive.

BARRYMORE. There is a thunderbolt, but the tree is rotten before it is blasted. What can a thunderbolt do to a rotten tree?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. It can overturn it.

BARRYMORE. That's what it does—that and nothing more.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. He's rotted, you say. You don't mean morally.

BARRYMORE. Of course not. I mean his principle of life—his faith. (*Suddenly from the inner room the single knock, followed by the series of brief firm strokes, is repeated. The four men start to their feet.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Again!

SOTHERN. What *is* it?

HAMPDEN. Steady. It can't be dangerous.

SOTHERN (*tentatively*). A trick?

HAMPDEN. Possibly.

BARRYMORE. It's our imagination perhaps.

SOTHERN. Four imaginations at once!

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Shall we send for the waiter?

HAMPDEN. *That* waiter?

BARRYMORE. We don't need him. The key's in the lock.

HAMPDEN. We must open the door.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*who up to this point has seemed more shaken than anybody else*). I agree with Mr. Hampden. The door must be opened. (*He moves toward the key.*)

HAMPDEN (*interposing*). Let me open that door, Sir Johnston. (*As Forbes-Robertson pauses, but does not yield, he adds*) I *want* to.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*with quiet dignity*). I feel that the duty is mine, gentlemen. I am not your host perhaps, but I named this inn to you. If the place has any risks for us, I feel that I should first meet them.

BARRYMORE (*as they follow Forbes-Robertson*). It tests one's mettle.

SOTHERN. It's like the platform at Elsinore.

HAMPDEN. Sothern, in the contribution of cheerful remarks to a grim occasion I know only one character in history or fiction who surpasses you.

SOTHERN. Who is that?

HAMPDEN. Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

SOTHERN. Thank you—Bob. (*They laugh a little. Forbes-Robertson, after a brief argument with the lock, has opened the door. In the mild candle-light of the inner room they are aware of the standing figures of five men. The figure nearest the door advances to greet Forbes-Robertson.*)

THE FIGURE. Good evening, Sir Johnston. You remember Henry Irving?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*falling back aghast*). Irving! Irving! But—

IRVING. It is true I have laid aside the body. The body, Sir Johnston, is only a pleasing incumbrance.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Quite so, quite so.

IRVING. May I introduce my companions?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*gasping*). Delighted.

IRVING. This is Mr. Edwin Booth. This is David Garrick. Mr. Thomas Betterton—Charles II's time, you remember. And this is Richard Burbage, who knew our great poet in life. All Hamlets, as you perceive, and all—(*he looks down modestly*) except one—notable.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*half fainting, but invincibly polite*). I —I don't see the exception.

IRVING. I should explain perhaps—

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Quite unnecessary.

IRVING. That we form the Elsinore Club, a little group of Hamlets, who engage a small room in this old inn for our exclusive use. Our meetings are few, but to-night when we heard that four living Hamlets were to dine in the next room, we felt that their presence was a summons.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Very—very nice of you. Let me introduce you to my American friends. Mr. E. H. Sothern, Mr. Walter Hampden, Mr. John Barrymore. (*The Americans make breastworks of each other.*)

BOOTH (*very pleasantly*). I am glad to meet Americans in any world. You won't mind our not being flesh and blood?

HAMPDEN (*courageously*). Don't mention it.

SOTHERN. *Please* don't mention it.

IRVING. Between gentlemen a difference of that sort is immaterial.

BARRYMORE. Decidedly immaterial.

HAMPDEN. Come, Jack, no puns. What will our friends think of our taste?

BETTERTON (*very politely*). We should think it Shakespearian.

GARRICK (*alertly*). You will all pardon us, I hope, for not offering you the Englishman's hand-shake. Our hands, un-

luckily, are incapable of receiving or returning pressure. It is one of the few points that make death regrettable.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*still heroically polite*). I'm sure death must be very—very jolly. By the way, Sir Henry, we were curious about that little table.

IRVING. What table?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The little one behind you with the untasted glass of wine.

IRVING. That is a table and a glass which we set at every meeting for—(*he pauses a moment*)—for one whom we call the unnamed guest.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. He doesn't come regularly?

IRVING. So far he has never come at all. His glass of wine has never been tasted. (*He glances toward the table.*) It is untasted now.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*delicately*). A painful memory?

IRVING. No. I should rather say a pleasing hope.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*tactfully changing the subject*). Won't you sit down and join us in our little talk about Hamlet?

BARRYMORE. Please do.

GARRICK. We shall be most happy.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*with a shade of misgiving*). You—you can sit down?

GARRICK. Easily. You see, sir, we are virtually air, and air is very good-natured and accommodates itself to every situation.

SOTHERN. If you will pardon a living man's curiosity—

GARRICK (*with his crisp politeness*). I never pardon curiosity, because I regard it as a virtue.

SOTHERN. Thank you. I don't quite see how you—you hold together. Air doesn't.

GARRICK. A pertinent question, Mr. Sothern. A ghost is in fact somewhat more than air, and my hasty definition was inaccurate. We are, as it were, patterns in air.

IRVING. We are a form that controls the air-particles.

HAMPDEN. But not always the same particles?

GARRICK. No, we change the air in our bodies as readily as you change the air in your lungs.

HAMPDEN. And with these thin bodies of yours, do you drink the wines that this inn furnishes?

GARRICK. No, we bring our own wines with us, and they are rarefied to suit our constitutions.

SOTHERN. Let us all sit down, gentlemen. Here is a deep easy-chair, Mr. Betterton.

BETTERTON (*with old-world courtesy*). Thank you, sir.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*in a whisper*). Sit between me and him, Sothern.

SOTHERN (*wrily, but smiling*). All right.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*still whispering*). But there's Irving on the other side.

SOTHERN (*same tone*). I can't sit on both sides of you, Forbes.

(*The party seat themselves in the following order from right to left: Betterton, Sothern, Forbes-Robertson, Irving, Barrymore, Booth, Hampden, Garrick, Burbage. They sit, not in a straight line, but in an irregular and broken semicircle; Irving, far back at centre, is half hidden by his neighbors. The end of one of the dining-tables is thrust forward between Garrick and Hampden, and each rests his arm upon it from time to time. The strong, darkly picturesque face of Burbage is so far to the left as practically to be excluded from the semicircle.*)

SOTHERN (*who has mechanically raised his hand to his hair with slightly disquieting results*). I hope you'll excuse my hair. (*He addresses Betterton.*) It's—it's excited to-night.

BETTERTON (*graciously*). Its excitement is highly picturesque. It is like rising flame.

SOTHERN (*trying to recover his playfulness*). Not in color, I hope.

BETTERTON. And what harm, sir, has your country to point out in the color of rising flame?

SOTHERN (*hastily*). Oh, none—none whatever. (*To Forbes-Robertson in a whisper.*) Was *his* hair red? (*Forbes-Robertson makes a gesture of despairing ignorance. Sothern essays another topic.*) Sam Pepys said a very nice thing about your Hamlet, Mr. Betterton.

BETTERTON. Indeed!

SOTHERN. Yes, where he says that the Hamlet gave him fresh reason never to think enough of Betterton. We think it one of the valuable testimonies to your greatness.

BETTERTON. Pepys? Who was the gentleman? I don't recall him.

SOTHERN. The government clerk who wrote the Diary.

BETTERTON. A government clerk? My hearing grows daily more defective. I understood you to say that the man's testimony was valuable. (*Sothern, after a comically despairing look at Forbes-Robertson, gives up the conversation for the time being.*)

BARRYMORE (*tremulously to Irving*). Should you mind solving a little difficulty for me?

IRVING. Not at all.

BARRYMORE. Where were you all when we first opened the door?

IRVING. We disappeared. That was on account of the waiter.

BARRYMORE. The waiter?

IRVING. The lower classes have an aversion to disembodied spirits. Not a cabman or a chimney-sweep in all London but would object to sitting side by side with a dead man.

BARRYMORE. Very—very stupid of them. (*His teeth chatter.*)

IRVING. You feel a draught, sir?

BARRYMORE. No-no-no.

IRVING. In life—

BARRYMORE (*with a start*). I beg your pardon?

IRVING. In life I was subject to colds; I hated draughts. But

as a ghost I am happily exempt. Being air, you see, we are air-proof.

BARRYMORE. Very logical.

IRVING. We have a little joke—you see we have very good times among ourselves—

BARRYMORE. I am sure you do.

IRVING. And we say that a ghost being air and a draught being only air in motion, a ghost when he moves is himself a draught.

BARRYMORE. Very—very *penetrating.* (*He buttons the two top buttons of his coat.*)

HAMPDEN (*accosting Burbage*). Mr. Burbage, there is one question that I am sure my friends and I should all like to ask you. (*Everybody listens.*)

BURBAGE. I shall answer you if I know the answer and approve the question.

HAMPDEN. How was Shakespeare esteemed in your day?

BURBAGE. Shakespeare in my day was a master—for everybody.

HAMPDEN. We are all glad to know that. One of our contemporaries has discussed his limitations.

BURBAGE. The man who seeks limitations in Shakespeare reveals his own. Who is the fellow?

HAMPDEN. An Irishman—one Bernard Shaw.

BURBAGE. The Irish, even in my time, disputed certainties, among others, the righteousness of English rule. What kind of man is this Irishman?

SOTHERN. An eccentric, Mr. Burbage—takes neither meat nor wine.

BURBAGE. Naturally, he wouldn't like Shakespeare. Tell him—he's at large, I suppose?

SOTHERN. As yet.

BURBAGE. Tell him we have a railed-off section in the next life for Abusers of Shakespeare. There's a special punishment for them.

SOTHERN. What is that?

BURBAGE. Reading each other's works.

HAMPDEN. May I ask one more question, Mr. Burbage?

BURBAGE. Proceed.

HAMPDEN. You know there are two versions of Hamlet?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Three, Walter, three.

HAMPDEN. Three, then. My friend's learning, Mr. Burbage, (*he waves a hand toward Forbes-Robertson*) is the terror of his associates.

BURBAGE. They are very easily terrified.

SOTHERN. There, Forbes!

BURBAGE. An actor should not know too much. As my friend Ben Jonson used to say: "Moderation in everything—except drink."

HAMPDEN. This is my question: Did Shakespeare intentionally make Hamlet older in his last version?

BURBAGE. He did, Mr. Hampden. He gave him years—and pounds.

BOOTH. The years are weights enough.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. In your case, yes, Mr. Booth—because they were diadems.

BOOTH (*touched*). You are very kind.

BURBAGE (*to Forbes-Robertson*). Speaking of pounds and years, it is an odd thing that Time, in your world, is as cruel in his gifts as in his thefts. We fortunately (*he waves his hand toward his companions*) have made our peace with Time.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*very delicately*). Peace with victory. (*The living auditors smile, but the allusion is lost upon the ghosts.*)

HAMPDEN. Mr. Garrick, do you think Hamlet was mad?

GARRICK (*abrupt, but genial*). No. Do you?

HAMPDEN. No.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. After all, gentlemen—who *does* think he was mad?

SOTHERN. The lunatics.

BARRYMORE. And the alienists.

SOTHERN. Synonyms, Jack, synonyms.

HAMPDEN. If I may go on, Mr. Garrick—

GARRICK. I love to be questioned, Mr. Hampden.

HAMPDEN. How do you account for the delay in the vengeance?

GARRICK (*after a pause*). The point is a little hard, I confess. May I tell you a guess of mine that has never quite become an opinion?

THE COMPANY. Please do.

GARRICK. Hamlet is the soul of honor?

BETTERTON, BOOTH, FORBES-ROBERTSON. Yes.

GARRICK. Very well. He is so placed that he cannot murder his uncle without baseness.

IRVING (*quietly*). Prove it.

GARRICK. He can do none of the decent things. He cannot challenge the King to a duel.

BARRYMORE. No.

GARRICK. He cannot invade Denmark with an army.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Perhaps not.

GARRICK. He cannot bring the King to trial.

HAMPDEN. No.

GARRICK. He has to stab the King when off his guard, and to owe the chance to his footing as a trusted relative.

BOOTH. Not really trusted.

GARRICK. *Practically* trusted. He has the advantages of trust. He has to murder like a sneak.

BOOTH (*with pain*). Never!

BURBAGE. If you had started to make that remark in William Shakespeare's presence, Mr. Garrick (*he makes an emphatic pause*)—

GARRICK (*with a sort of flashing courtesy*). Well, Mr. Burbage?

BURBAGE (*drily*). You would have completed it upon your back.

GARRICK. I should have viewed that as an accolade.

HAMPDEN. But he doesn't finally kill the King like a sneak.

GARRICK. Not finally, I grant. The turn of events prevents that. Hamlet was waiting for that turn.

HAMPDEN. That clears his honor, Mr. Booth.

BOOTH (*with endearing petulance*). Who wants to send his honor to the laundry?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I have an idea myself that isn't quite Mr. Garrick's, but is first cousin to it.

GARRICK (*invariably affable*). Mine is proud of the cousinship.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Can any of you tell me why the murder of the King, when it comes, seems so unreal? (*General hesitation.*)

BARRYMORE (*tentatively*). The King himself is unreal.

GARRICK. That makes his guilt unreal.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But one step more, gentlemen.

SOTHERN. Take it yourself, Forbes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That makes the vengeance unreal.

BARRYMORE. And Hamlet shrinks from the unreality!

SOTHERN. Hold on! Hold on!

BETTERTON. I am quite of your mind, Mr. Sothern. These friends of ours consider things too curiously.

IRVING (*slowly*). I'm not sure of that, Betterton. (*He ruminates.*) That *is* a shoddy court.

BOOTH. So unlike Shakespeare's other courts—with their freedom and cheerfulness!

BURBAGE. I should call it a devilish court.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Devilish, by all means! Devilish, most certainly, my dear sir. But pinchbeck too.

BARRYMORE. The King's a mountebank.

BURBAGE. We called him a damned villain. (*Marked attention from the living hearers.*) You seem at a loss, gentlemen. The word has fallen out of use perhaps.

SOTHERN. Not altogether. It is known—to antiquarians.

BURBAGE. Lucky fellows!

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Put another king in the King's place—Richard III, for instance. We should have another play.

BOOTH. What other play?

BARRYMORE. A conquest of great objective difficulties. That would have roused Hamlet. As it is, things are too easy.

HAMPDEN (*pithily*). The ease creates the difficulty.

BURBAGE (*robustly incisive*). You mean it's hard because it's easy?

HAMPDEN. Not quite that, Mr. Burbage. We make a distinction. If a man says it's hard because it's easy, that is nonsense. But if he says the ease creates the difficulty, that is epigram.

BURBAGE. So that is epigram. We know Martial of course.

SOTHERN (*whispering*). Do we, Forbes?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Sh-sh-sh! Assume a virtue—

BURBAGE. Martial taught me that an epigram was a curt way of being bright. I judge you juniors have turned it into a smart way of being silly.

HAMPDEN. Infallible, Mr. Burbage! You have mastered both its theory and practice.

BETTERTON. Let us have your own idea, Richard. (*As Burbage looks uncertain, he proceeds.*) About the cause of the delay.

BURBAGE. Isn't it plain, Betterton, that a decent fellow might want to think twice before killing his stepfather, his uncle, and his king? (*This simple remark of Burbage surprises everybody.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I realize perfectly, Mr. Burbage, that you and I might hesitate to kill our relatives, but—

BARRYMORE (*laughing*). "Might" is good.

SOTHERN. Hush, Jack. Not all of us have your luck in relatives. Go on, Forbes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I was only going to suggest that Hamlet is bound by a duty, a solemn obligation, to murder the King.

BURBAGE. Well, sir, are we all so brisk about our solemn duties? If you are always punctual in your own murders, I can only say that things have changed very much in England since the sixteenth century.

BETTERTON. My friend Burbage is a little heated, but is he not right in his plain and sound reason for Hamlet's deliberation? Consider it, Mr. Forbes.

SOTHERN (*whispering to Betterton*). Sir Johnston.

BETTERTON (*in an altered voice*). Ah! yes, Sir Johnston, I think you are quite right in your insistence upon the virtue of punctuality. It is a merit which humble commoners like myself permit themselves to share with their titled betters. (*To Irving.*) You too are a knight, Sir Henry.

IRVING. An undeserving one.

BETTERTON. In our day, Mr. Burbage, not even the greatest performers received the honor of knighthood.

BURBAGE (*gruffly*). The Crown was short-sighted.

BETTERTON (*with his usual suavity, to the rest*). We consoled ourselves with the thought that we were kings for the hour, and that for that hour kings were our subjects.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. We thought in Sir Henry's case that the name embellished the title.

BETTERTON. Admirably said. It deserves a place in one of Mr. Garrick's prologues.

GARRICK. You are too good.

BARRYMORE. If we may brag a little, Mr. Betterton—

BETTERTON (*always courtly*). By all means.

BARRYMORE. Some of us have acted even greater parts than kings. Mr. Hampden here has played a Christ, and Sir Johnston has taken practically the same part in another play.

BETTERTON (*with suave dignity*). My managers never asked

me to play the Christ. (*He continues very gently.*) They respected my inadequacy. (*Sothern laughs.*) Sir Johnston shone in the part no doubt. (*Slight pause.*)

GARRICK. We have drifted a long way from the subject, and I am sorry, for I own that I was interested.

BARRYMORE. What was the subject?

GARRICK. Mr. Burbage, I believe, was telling us that it was natural to postpone murder. Is he right?

SOTHERN. I, for one, agree with Mr. Burbage. There are dramatic critics walking the streets of New York to-day who would have been dead years ago if I had carried out my resolutions. (*All laugh, except Burbage and Betterton, who, never having been reviewed, miss the point.*)

HAMPDEN. Come. Come, Sothern, what will our seventeenth- and eighteenth-century friends think of our caperings?

BETTERTON (*graciously*). Do not distress yourself, Mr. Sothern. I cannot speak for Mr. Garrick, (*he bows deferentially*) but Mr. Burbage and I in our theatrical experience became acquainted with every type of clow—humorist, I would say. The species, I infer, is abundant in America.

SOTHERN. It is ubiquitous in America, Mr. Betterton. One might suppose that it was a shipload of Shakespearian clowns instead of religious folk that came over to people the country in the Mayflower.

BURBAGE. Mayflower? I don't know it.

HAMPDEN. Emigrants from England, Mr. Burbage, 1621.

BURBAGE. Ah, 1621. I had myself migrated from England at that time—for cogent reasons.

IRVING. The Americans are quite unjust to themselves, Mr. Burbage. There is no kinder or keener people upon earth.

SOTHERN (*his voice shaking a little*). We are keen enough at least to know our friends, Sir Henry—

BOOTH (*very quietly*). And kind enough to love them.

SOTHERN (*apart to Forbes-Robertson*). They are nice fellows, if they are dead.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*thoughtfully*). Yes. I see the whole thing now. The point isn't to be dead or alive, but to be decent.

SOTHERN. Right, Forbes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The change death makes isn't—give me a word.

SOTHERN. Vital?

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*smiling*). Precisely.

GARRICK (*pleasantly*). Let us get back to our discussion. I began, I believe, by suggesting that Hamlet hesitated because he couldn't kill the King in a manly and open way. Sir Johnston thinks he hesitated because the King is a man of straw and Hamlet cannot bring himself to assassinate a puppet. Mr. Burbage thinks that it is natural to put off murder, a position which is surely creditable to his humanity, and Mr. Sothern—jokingly perhaps—assented. I am sure that we should all welcome a deliverance from another quarter. Mr. Hampden, why does Hamlet hesitate?

HAMPDEN (*coolly*). He *doesn't* hesitate.

BARRYMORE. What is that, Walter?

GARRICK (*with his urbane quickness*). Do I understand you, Mr. Hampden?

SOTHERN. Walter, I know it isn't fair to ask a man to incriminate himself, but will you please repeat that?

HAMPDEN. He *doesn't* hesitate.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Mr. Hampden, *surely!*

SOTHERN. Isn't it agreed on all hands that Hamlet is the study of the ruin of a mind through hesitation, like Macbeth through ambition?

FORBES-RORERTSON. Or Othello through jealousy?

HAMPDEN. Answer me one question: Where does he hesitate?

SOTHERN. Everywhere.

HAMPDEN. The answer of helplessness. I will answer my own question. Hamlet hesitates just once.

IRVING. Where?

HAMPDEN. "Now I might do it pat, now he is praying." That is the one case.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Impossible.

HAMPDEN. Name another.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. "To be or not to be."

HAMPDEN. Mere abstraction,—echoes of Wittenberg. He's making no personal decision. The word "I" is not in that soliloquy.

SOTHERN. But he scourges himself for hesitation. "O! what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"

HAMPDEN. Not for hesitation, Sothern; for delay. He is surprised at his delay. Why is he surprised? Because he is an unhesitating character.

SOTHERN (*sinking back in his chair*). What you need, Walter, isn't logic,—but *medicine.*

HAMPDEN. Hamlet is the most unhesitating character I know. He grapples with a brother in a sister's grave—without hesitation. Run over in your mind Shakespeare's resolute characters,—Coriolanus, Shylock, Petruchio, Hotspur, Faulconbridge, Octavius,—which of them would have done that without stopping to think?

IRVING. After all, though, you have the lapse of time—between the command and the deed.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. And—at the play-scene, you know—Hamlet does postpone.

HAMPDEN. Unhesitatingly. Except in that one speech—which most of you refuse to act—he is, at every moment sure of what he wants or doesn't want to do.

GARRICK (*who has been listening very attentively*). Why, then, did Shakespeare introduce the delay?

HAMPDEN. A pertinent question, Mr. Garrick. As I see it, Shakespeare didn't *invent* that delay. He *discovered it.*

SOTHERN (*turning to Forbes-Robertson with a stage gesture*). Shall this fellow live?

HAMPDEN. I agree largely with Barrymore, if I understand him, that the essence of the play is despair,—not hesitation. But it's despair vocal,—despair unbosoming itself with a freedom, a vivacity, and a profusion that you can find nowhere else. But this unbosomment takes time. Shakespeare didn't seek the delay. He ran into it. He found the time had gone.

BARRYMORE. According to you, then, Walter, the hesitation is a myth and the delay is an accident?

HAMPDEN. Put it so, if you like.

BARRYMORE. But even so Shakespeare ought to have found a reason for the delay in Hamlet's character.

HAMPDEN. Not he. You don't know him, Jack. Falstaff-Shakespeare will give you no reason upon compulsion,—no, not if reasons were as plenty as blackberries.

SOTHERN. What do you think of it, Jack?

BARRYMORE. I think there's a grain of sense in it.

SOTHERN. Jack always had a merciful disposition. Mr. Betterton, what do you think of Mr. Hampden's ideas?

BETTERTON (*affably*). I think Hamlet could have learned a great deal about himself from Mr. Hampden. (*General laughter, in which Hampden heartily joins.*)

HAMPDEN. A home-thrust, I grant, Mr. Betterton, but after all who knows everything about himself?

BOOTH. Who knows anything about himself?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Who indeed? Irving, haven't critics sometimes told you things about your acting that you didn't know?

IRVING (*in his slow, sly way*). Often. (*Laughter.*)

SOTHERN. How does it happen that there are so many unsolved questions about Hamlet when he is drawn more fully —drawn *more*—than anybody else in Shakespeare?

BOOTH. Yes—it's a lavish portrayal.

GARRICK. The most lavish—and the least complete.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. It's like Shakespeare himself, don't you

think?—giving so much of himself, yet keeping so much back.

GARRICK. Both Hamlet and Shakespeare were great talkers.

SOTHERN. That explains it. The great talkers never come to the point.

BARRYMORE. That's why they are great talkers.

GARRICK (*indulgently*). Sometimes.

BARRYMORE. That is a very useful discovery of yours, Sothern, that great talkers never come to the point. Your friends have known it for a long time.

SOTHERN. Thank you, Jack. Next to flattery, I love candor.

GARRICK. I think I see—dimly—a solution of Mr. Sothern's paradox. On the side of thought and mood, Shakespeare worked out his Hamlet with quite extraordinary thoroughness. But for some reason—perhaps for that reason—he left his *conduct* in the rough.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But Hamlet *does* act, Mr. Garrick.

GARRICK. I know. He *does* act. But Shakespeare only *sketches* his activity.

HAMPDEN. He's saving time for speech.

GARRICK. Yes. It's that that gives his acts the effect of precipitation which so bewilders the people who want to think that he's irresolute.

HAMPDEN. And that's why, as Forbes very rightly said, the delineation is profuse and imperfect.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I thank you, gentlemen. But I think there's still another reason for our perplexities. There's a cloud on most of the evidence. Two-thirds of what Hamlet says is either disease or disguise.

IRVING (*very precisely*). *May* be either disease or disguise.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Thank you, Irving. I—I love to be reckless when I—have caution at my elbow. *May* be either disease or disguise.

BOOTH (*low-voiced and leaning forward*). But we see through both.

IRVING (*cautiously*). We peer into both.

BOOTH (*same tone*). But isn't that the very—the very sorcery of the character?—the reason within the distemper—the seriousness behind the jest, (*his voice drops still lower*) the *tenderness* under the brutality? (*This is received in a respectfully consenting silence, a tribute equally to Booth's idea and his voice.*)

HAMPDEN. That's why acting him is an achievement.

IRVING (*very quietly*). Or a catastrophe.

BOOTH. I see it, friends, with a new clearness. The part of the actor of Hamlet is to strip off the actor *in* Hamlet.

BURBAGE. Cobwebs! Cobwebs!

BOOTH. Are they cobwebs, Mr. Burbage? Take an example. What are the first words that Hamlet speaks?

BURBAGE (*at a loss*). Betterton?

BETTERTON (*consolingly gracious*). A little more than kin, and less than kind.

BOOTH. That is a joke—and a bad joke.

BURBAGE. Is it? I've laughed at worse.

BOOTH. So have I, Mr. Burbage. An American has to. But my point is that the most tragic part in all drama begins with a second-rate joke.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But that joke carries the tragedy.

BOOTH (*pleasantly querulous*). That's what *I* wanted to say, Forbes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Very sorry. Please *do* say it.

BOOTH. The actor has to extract the tragedy from the jest.

IRVING. The real Hamlet has to be extricated.

BOOTH (*earnestly*). As if a man whose child was dying in another place acted a comic part in the theatre, and you knew and read the heartbreak in the laughs.

BARRYMORE. True. The only difference is that Hamlet acts voluntarily—acts for his own sake.

SOTHERN. He laughs that he may not weep.

IRVING. Or that he *may*.

GARRICK. Good, Sir Henry. Laughter opens the path for tears.

BURBAGE. Shall I tell you what I played in Hamlet?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Do, please.

BURBAGE. I played a gallant gentleman who had fallen into undeserved misfortune. That was enough for my public and for me.

BOOTH (*with his instant sympathy*). I like that.

SOTHERN. But doesn't that simplify too much? There are so many undeserving sufferers.

BURBAGE. The theatre should simplify. That is its trade.

SOTHERN. *Our* Hamlet is a little more complex.

BURBAGE. Your Hamlet! *Your* Hamlet! The Hamlet I am talking about is the property of William Shakespeare.

SOTHERN. Yes, but the property is leased to many tenants.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Who all make improvements, as you say in America.

BARRYMORE. I agree with Mr. Burbage.

SOTHERN. You, Jack, too? Hasn't each century a right to its own Hamlet?

BARRYMORE. That depends.

SOTHERN. Every actor has his own. Yours isn't the same as Walter's.

HAMPDEN. Don't insult him, Sothern.

BARRYMORE (*looking at Hampden*). Please insult me, Sothern.

SOTHERN. By all means, Jack. Now, if a Hamlet can be spared for every actor, there should be one apiece for every century.

BARRYMORE. Every century has a right to the Hamlet *that it thinks is Shakespeare's,* not to the Hamlet *that it wants Shakespeare's to be.*

BURBAGE. Fine-spun, fine-spun. What do you say, Mr. Garrick?

GARRICK (*in his bright, meditative way*). The point is delicate.

BARRYMORE. You mustn't add to Shakespeare.

SOTHERN. You can't help it.

BARRYMORE. Very well. You must add only what you can't help.

SOTHERN. I don't see why I can't think of Hamlet as I like.

BARRYMORE. In your bathtub, you may; but not at the dinner-table.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. My dear Mr. Barrymore!

BARRYMORE. I mean nothing offensive, Sir Johnston, even to English delicacy. There's only one debatable Hamlet. Hamlet is a matter of record. Overstep the record, and that's not criticism—that's authorship.

IRVING. It's collaboration.

GARRICK. And Shakespeare, in writing a stage-play, invited that collaboration.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Even a record has to be interpreted.

BARRYMORE. I grant all that. I admit the honest interpretations. But I don't grant the twentieth century's right to twentieth-centuryize Hamlet.

GARRICK. Mr. Barrymore, I beg your pardon. What was that interesting word—twentieth-centuryize? When I go back to Hades I should like to submit it to my friend Dr. Johnson.

BARRYMORE (*to Hampden*). Did I say that, Walter?

HAMPDEN (*soothingly*). You are excited, Jack.

BARRYMORE. I take it back, Mr. Garrick. I shouldn't like to —to bother Dr. Johnson. But I stick to my idea. I don't grant that a tribe of Zulus has the right to put on a black Hamlet.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Suppose they didn't know that Danes were white.

BARRYMORE. They should know, but if they don't, why, that's the deviation they can't help and don't perceive; it's the only proper deviation.

SOTHERN. I think you're correct, Jack.

BARRYMORE (*with feeling*). You're very obliging, Sothern.

SOTHERN (*judicially*). Correct, but wrong.

BARRYMORE. Obliging, but nasty.

SOTHERN. Of course we must all keep within the Shakespearian fence.

IRVING. Where there is a fence.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That's the point, Sir Henry. The fence doesn't go quite round.

GARRICK. And where the fence stops, we extend the property to please ourselves.

BARRYMORE. Too many metaphors, Forbes. Just what do you mean?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. I mean Shakespeare sometimes allows us to think either of two things. Then we choose.

SOTHERN. And so we get a Hamlet that is partly ours without contradicting Shakespeare.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. And every century does the same.

BARRYMORE. Give me an instance.

SOTHERN. Well, there's his love for Ophelia—that's doubtful in Shakespeare.

BARRYMORE. Doesn't he say in so many words: "I loved Ophelia?"

SOTHERN. What of that? He said in so many words: "My father died within's two hours."

BARRYMORE. But the "I loved Ophelia" falls from Hamlet's mouth like a sledgehammer. It's his most emphatic speech.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. What makes it so emphatic in your ears, Mr. Barrymore? Isn't it your wish, your longing possibly, that he *should* love Ophelia?

SOTHERN. Isn't it your Hamlet borrowing his voice?

BARRYMORE. Why not stop where Shakespeare stops? That's safety. That's loyalty.

SOTHERN. But an actor must act a unit of some kind.

BARRYMORE. Why not Shakespeare's unit?

SOTHERN (*with a certain desperation*). Did Shakespeare unify?

SEVERAL (*in astonishment*). What?

SOTHERN. There's Hamlet—so many words and acts. Coleridge and Goethe do them up, so to speak, into a parcel. Did Shakespeare do them up?

HAMPDEN. And he thinks *I'm* crazy.

GARRICK. You surprise us all, Mr. Sothern. Do we understand you to say that Shakespeare did not conceive Hamlet as a whole?

BOOTH (*with subdued fervor*). He put the whole of him in every line.

SOTHERN (*cordially*). He did, Mr. Booth—the imaginative whole; it was that gift that made him Shakespeare. But there's another whole—a *logical* whole. Did Shakespeare conceive that?

GARRICK. In a word, the point is this: "Did Shakespeare have an opinion of Hamlet?"

SOTHERN. Perfectly stated, Mr. Garrick. Irving, what do you think?

IRVING (*passing his hand under his chin*). Ask Mr. Burbage.

SOTHERN. The very thing. Mr. Burbage, did Shakespeare have an opinion of Hamlet?

BURBAGE (*bluntly*). He didn't need one.

SOTHERN. Exactly. He didn't; we do. And all our gropings and bafflings come from our insistence on finding in the *picture* the *opinion* that isn't there.

IRVING. Criticism wants a critical Shakespeare.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. But, you know, we can't help being ourselves.

SOTHERN. True, Forbes. I long ago made that painful discovery.

BARRYMORE. Are we going to sit here and let Sothern take the brains out of Shakespeare without a word of protest?

SOTHERN. I wish I could pilfer his brains. I'd divide, Jack, with my needy friends.

BARRYMORE. Not with me, Sothern. The needy shouldn't rob the destitute.

BOOTH (*with an insistent gentleness*). I feel with Mr. Barrymore. Shakespeare was a great intelligence. Is it reasonable to suppose that such a mind asked less of its own creations than we do?

SOTHERN. I think he could have criticised, Mr. Booth, and doubtless he would have criticised if Ben Jonson had written *Hamlet*.

HAMPDEN. Why not put it this way? Criticism is a postscript to creation. Shakespeare, having written the letter, omitted the postscript; he was tired. *We* begin with the postscript. That's why we're so brisk about it.

BARRYMORE. I can't imagine a tired Shakespeare.

BURBAGE. Tired? You should have seen him.

SOTHERN. True, Mr. Burbage. You have caught us in our great neglect.

GARRICK. Let us see where we are. Mr. Sothern contends that we need a logical Hamlet. Shakespeare did not. And we are justified in making Hamlet logical by any suppositions that do not conflict with the Shakespearian evidence.

BARRYMORE. Do you believe all the Shakespearian evidence?

GARRICK (*smiling*). I could scarcely question it without disrespect to Shakespeare.

BARRYMORE. Do you believe Hamlet was thirty years old? Do you believe he was fat?

GARRICK (*with his crisp deference*). You press me hard, Mr. Barrymore.

BURBAGE. I have reasons for wanting to know why a gentleman should not be fat.

BETTERTON. Royalty itself has often been stout.

BARRYMORE. Very true; but a young collegian and our Hamlet—

GARRICK. Well, if Shakespeare didn't mind—

IRVING. Shakespeare was sometimes un-Shakespearian.

BOOTH. Perhaps; but who shall say when?

BARRYMORE. I've pointed out one place.

SOTHERN. Yes, and Mr. Burbage doesn't agree with you.

GARRICK. Agreement everywhere is impossible, but are there not points on which the wise would be nearly unanimous? I have made corrections sometimes where I thought I could see the dirty thumb of the Elizabethan public resting on Shakespeare's clean sheet.

HAMPDEN. Yes, or the dust from the old playbook or story-book sifting down upon his manuscript.

GARRICK. Very true, and I have sometimes asked myself if I did not act for Shakespeare in erasing that thumb-mark or in blowing off that dust.

HAMPDEN. Shakespeare in our time would have written a somewhat different Hamlet.

SOTHERN. And in his absence we write it for him. He should be very much obliged.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*in a lowered but audible voice*). You forget, Sothern, that Mr. Garrick himself made an alteration of Hamlet.

SOTHERN. I'm extremely sorry, Mr. Garrick. I intended nothing personal.

GARRICK. I like your frankness, Mr. Sothern. I confess that Shakespeare has some obligations to me (*everybody smiles*) which I could wish that he had not incurred. I did revise Hamlet.

HAMPDEN. I understand that you buried the gravediggers.

GARRICK. Ineffectually. Their resurrection was prompt.

BARRYMORE. What is a grave to a character in Shakespeare?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Were people in your day shocked by the gravediggers?

GARRICK. Not exactly. M. Voltaire was shocked, and we were shocked by the discovery that we had shocked him.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. If you will pardon the question, Mr. Garrick, do you still believe in the principle of revision?

GARRICK (*after a moment's thought*). I think I do. It is audacious no doubt to collaborate with Shakespeare—

IRVING. Unasked.

GARRICK. Unasked certainly; but all acting is collaboration. That's the great impiety. Now if the pietist can stand the mixture of Shakespeare and Garrick on the boards, why should he boggle at the mixture of Shakespeare and Garrick in the text?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. One may omit perhaps, but one shouldn't add material.

GARRICK. Every gesture is new material.

SOTHERN. One question, Mr. Garrick. Suppose we had the tones and the gestures. Suppose Shakespeare in the character of Hamlet had talked into a phonograph and posed before a cinema? Should you as an actor feel bound to follow his lead?

GARRICK. I know little of those interesting devices, Mr. Sothern, but I think I shouldn't feel bound to follow his lead if I thought myself a better actor than he.

SOTHERN. Precisely. The greater artist should control?

GARRICK. Yes.

SOTHERN. Very well. If Shakespeare had happened to be a greater poet than you—I mention the possibility—you wouldn't have sanctioned the revision of his text?

GARRICK. Let us discriminate. I think that Shakespeare as an inferior actor might nevertheless have made useful suggestions to Mr. Burbage.

BURBAGE. He did.

GARRICK. Thank you. In exactly the same way I think that I, a very inferior writer, might make useful suggestions to Shakespeare. Shakespeare knew his England. I knew my England. When *his* Hamlet had to be offered to *my* England, I put my knowledge at his disposal.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. One may know too much sometimes.

GARRICK (*smiling*). That was never my infirmity, Sir Johnston.

IRVING. Mr. Garrick speaks of his England. *His* England

wanted Hamlet. So did mine. Does England want him still?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Yes.

BARRYMORE. The world wants him, Sir Henry.

HAMPDEN. More than ever.

IRVING. Why? (*A short pause follows.*)

SOTHERN. We have had a World-War, Sir Henry—you may have heard?

IRVING. We know—it made our world populous.

BARRYMORE. Our world—the younger world—after the—the—

HAMPDEN. The fratricide.

BARRYMORE. Yes, the likeness holds even there—our world is almost in Hamlet's case. It faces impossible responsibilities with a death-chill at its heart.

HAMPDEN. The world has seen its own heart.

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*in his circumspect way*). And that—that is its spectre.

BOOTH (*with sympathy*). You suffer?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. Yes, we suffer, God knows, but the worst is that the ideal in us seems to be helpless.

BARRYMORE. Helpless as Hamlet.

SOTHERN. We are his kindred, you see—that's our consolation.

BOOTH (*slowly*). Hamlet's anguish was disinterested. That is why one loves him—(*he adds with an exquisite respect*)—and his kin.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. That is something which makes even "Thank you's" helpless, Mr. Booth.

HAMPDEN (*after a silence*). It is true about Hamlet's disinterestedness. He despaired when his personal prospects were still bright.

BARRYMORE. And it was the ignominy of the sum of things —not this man or that fact—that overwhelmed him.

HAMPDEN. Exactly. The world was Claudius.

IRVING. A Claudius that he *couldn't* kill.

HAMPDEN. That made it useless for him to kill the individual.

BOOTH. And that explains why Shakespeare lets him be so harsh with Ophelia—the harshness that troubles us all,—doesn't it? (*He looks around for confirmation.*)

SEVERAL. Yes, yes!

BOOTH. The last faith that a man in a rotten world gives up is the faith in the woman he loves. Hamlet's bitterness to Ophelia is Shakespeare's way of telling us that his last defences have been taken.

GARRICK (*to the living actors as a group*). You think, then, that the world of to-day is a sort of Hamlet?

HAMPDEN. Yes. (*The others nod.*)

GARRICK. What part does your young America take in the tragedy? (*There is a silence.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*to the Americans*). May I answer for America?

THE AMERICANS (*eagerly*). Yes.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. America is the Fortinbras in the play.

BETTERTON. Shakespeare always leaves some hopeful person on the stage at the end of the slaughter.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. And the Shakespeare that runs the world seasons his justice with the same mercy. (*There is a pause after this which no one is eager to break.*)

GARRICK (*rising to his feet*). Time is passing, gentlemen. (*He goes to a window at the left front, and puts aside one edge of the curtain.*)

BETTERTON. Is the day breaking, Mr. Garrick?

GARRICK. It will break soon, Mr. Betterton. (*The four ghosts have risen, and the four living men follow their example with a deliberation that is like an entreaty for delay.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. May we ask without indiscretion, gentlemen, if you are restricted like the Ghost in Hamlet? Do you—do you fade at the crowing of the cock?

BETTERTON. No, Sir Johnston, we are not forced to go, but

we like the milder hours. Our nerves are more finely poised than yours, and we quail a little at your glares and noises.

SOTHERN. Ours quail too. Many of us flee to the country every night.

BETTERTON. We have fled altogether. As Thomas Fuller once remarked to me: "Life is the bustling square: Death is the quiet suburb." (*To his fellows.*) We must thank our friends for a most enjoyable evening, even if in the first purpose that drew us here we have been disappointed.

BARRYMORE. The first purpose!

SOTHERN. What is—no, no, I beg your pardon.

GARRICK. You have a right to be curious, gentlemen, the more so that your presence was a factor in our purpose. But we must entreat your indulgence. It is hard for us to express that purpose in words which shall not seem unreasonable—or even worse—to—unprepared hearers.

BOOTH (*pointing to the further table in the inner room*). It is symbolized in that table. (*Pause. The ghosts and the living men look at each other.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. The table—for the unnamed guest.

SOTHERN. It is not for us to ask you to be explicit.

BOOTH (*with visible effort*). His name has been often on our lips to-night. (*The four living men start. Between the eyes of the two groups there passes a question and an answer.*)

HAMPDEN. Do you always set that glass upon that table? (*The pauses in this section of the dialogue are long and freighted.*)

BETTERTON. Always.

HAMPDEN. And its contents are never tasted?

BETTERTON. Never.

SOTHERN. The idea is not quite so strange to us as you might think. My friend Barrymore before you came in was suggesting that all this yearning of the nations and the ages toward Hamlet might—might—he put it into words; I —daren't.

BETTERTON (*quoting in a low voice*). Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, And thou no breath at all?

GARRICK (*in a voice as low as Betterton's*). We knew of your meeting to-night, and—you see, don't you?—we thought that if all the Hamlets, the dead and the living— (*He gets no further.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*same tone*). At this time—when the soul of the world has become his soul—

BARRYMORE. It is hard for us to think that *we are* and that *he cannot be*—we who are all of us—in a way—his wraiths and shadows.

BURBAGE (*in a masculine voice*). Gentlemen, our effort has failed. I lent myself to the attempt with misgiving, though I confess, with eagerness. Let us no longer dally with the impossible. It is time to take leave of our entertainers and be gone.

GARRICK. Mr. Burbage is right, I think; we should be gone. But there is something to be done before we part.

HAMPDEN. Something?

GARRICK. I propose that we stand together, all of us, the dead and the living, and drink a cup to the soul of that deathless being who has never been, of that dream of which, as Mr. Barrymore says, we are all the wraiths and shadows. (*Low murmurs of approval from all sides. A bottle is fetched from the inner room. Forbes-Robertson fetches a flask from one of the nearer tables. Glasses are taken and filled.*)

BOOTH. Let us face the small table. (*He points toward the inner room.*)

GARRICK. Mr. Burbage, you are the oldest Hamlet among us. Will you propose the toast?

BURBAGE (*at centre, in a powerful but subdued voice*). To the—(*he pauses for a word*) to the—Undying Prince!

ALL. To the Undying Prince! (*They are about to raise the glasses to their lips when they are checked by a change in*

the atmosphere, as it were, behind the small table in the inner room. A mist appears, a mist made—so one might fancy in this hour and place—out of the sighs sent up by peoples and by ages. As it grows, it condenses, and, in condensing, darkens. An edge defines itself here and there; the angle of a shoulder, the dip of a chin, the tip of a booted foot, the cross of a rapier-hilt, the shadow of a tuft of dark hair on a disk of ivory forehead. From moment to moment the parts gather shape and clearness. What emerges at length is the erect and slender figure of a man of twenty-five, clad in black, with a sheathed rapier at his side, a high carriage, and an expression remote yet infinitely gracious in the curves of the sensitive lips and the recesses of the profoundly melancholy eyes. He looks into the faces of the nine Hamlets, reaches his hand toward the cup on the small table, and with a courteous gesture in which his rank is at once remembered and forgotten raises the vessel to his lips. The glasses in the other room are lifted by trembling hands in the same moment. From the mouths of the four living Hamlets come whispered fragments of the Shakespearian text that trail off brokenly into a shuddering silence.)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. To be, or not to be—that— (*His voice breaks.*)

BARRYMORE. And you, my sinews, grow not instant—

SOTHERN. Angels and ministers of grace—

HAMPDEN. This bodiless creation ecstasy— (*The figure looks upon them with the tenderness of a friend and fellow-sufferer in its unfathomable eyes. But it is already disappearing in a reflux of the mist out of which it momentarily emerged. The last thing to vanish is the lifted arm in the courtesy of the parting salutation. The five dead men have likewise disappeared when the living men at last turn their eyes upon each other. They speak in gasps.*)

HAMPDEN. Don't *say* anything.

SOTHERN. Do men speak—*ever*—after such things?

BARRYMORE (*to Forbes-Robertson*). What did you see?

FORBES-ROBERTSON. (*poignantly*). *You* know.

SOTHERN (*looking round*). They are gone—*the others.*

FORBES-ROBERTSON. They had what they wanted.

BARRYMORE. That—that *proves* it.

HAMPDEN (*struggling for self-mastery*). This won't do. Look here, friends. We are men.

SOTHERN. We were last night.

HAMPDEN. We are. (*He goes to the window at front left and raises the curtain. The faintest of imaginable dawns—hardly strong enough even to dim the candles—filters into the room.*)

BARRYMORE. Open the window. (*Hampden throws up the sash, and the entrance of a slight current of fresh air is indicated in a just perceptible flickering of the candles.*)

HAMPDEN (*returning*). Listen to me. This mustn't be spoken of—anywhere—ever. (*The others assent.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON. If we told people, they would think us mad.

BARRYMORE. If we *told* them, we *should* be.

HAMPDEN (*low, but emphatic*). *This hasn't been.* You understand, don't you? *It has not been.*

SOTHERN (*more briskly*). You are right. We have been cheated by our nerves. The hour—the place—

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*also a little cheered*). Our common bond with— (*He motions vaguely toward the inner room.*)

HAMPDEN (*with force*). With Hamlet, Forbes, with Hamlet—not with anything in there.

SOTHERN (*to Barrymore, who has been moving restlessly a pace or two from time to time*). What do you think, Jack?

BARRYMORE (*in a firm but unexpressive voice*). I think Hampden is right.

FORBES-ROBERTSON. If we couldn't imagine ghosts—*where there are none*—we couldn't be Hamlets.

HAMPDEN. True. The first thing is to get out of here. (*All prepare to go.*)

SOTHERN. I wish we had a sword. There is one in that cabinet.

HAMPDEN. Why do you want a sword?

SOTHERN. To swear on it: Never to speak of this that we have seen. (*To Barrymore, who has taken a step toward the inner room.*) Where are you going, Jack?

BARRYMORE. In there for a second.

SOTHERN. Why?

BARRYMORE. I don't know why. I want to.

SOTHERN (*entreatingly*). *Don't* want to.

BARRYMORE (*obligingly*). All right.

HAMPDEN (*after a moment's thought*). Let him go, Sothern. We mustn't be intimidated.

SOTHERN (*very gently*). Very well, Jack. (*The three watch Barrymore intently as he enters the inner room. The silence is profound. Barrymore, slowly advancing, reaches the table. He tries it with his hand as if testing its solidity. He tests the cup by applying his fingers to the stem. Very slowly he lifts the cup and looks into its hollow.*)

FORBES-ROBERTSON (*breathlessly*). Well?

BARRYMORE (*profoundly stirred, in a low penetrating voice*). THE CUP IS DRAINED.

(*Pale as death, Barrymore leans upon the table for support. Forbes-Robertson, sinking into a chair, buries his face in his hands. Sothern, half-fainting, reels back into the arms of Hampden.*

HAMPDEN (*white-lipped, the drops starting from his forehead*). God in Heaven!

NOTE: In the above play characters living and dead, utter various opinions. The author has no reason to believe that any one of those opinions is, or was, actually held by the person who is made to utter it.

CURTAIN

AN ODD ENTANGLEMENT

CHARACTERS

HARRY WALTON, *lawyer, 30 years*
MABEL WALTON, *his wife, 26 years*
JACK BERESFORD, *physician, 32 years*
MILDRED BERESFORD, *his wife, 22 years*
Place: New York. *Time:* the present day.

SCENE I

Dining-room in the house of Harry and Mabel Walton; half-past-eight of a summer morning. Cheerful sunlight tempered by lace curtains. Breakfast on small table centre; Harry at right, Mabel at left, of table. Furniture and appointments of an elegant simplicity. Both husband and wife are depressed and preoccupied; the man pensive and moody, the woman glancing at him from time to time in the pauses of her own meditations.

MABEL. Is your coffee sweet enough, Harry?

HARRY (*emerging from his thoughts with an effort*). Yes. No. I haven't tasted it.

MABEL. It's half gone.

HARRY (*looking at his cup*). So it is. No, I don't think it was sweet. I've a notion it will take a great many lumps of sugar to sweeten my coffee after this. Don't be alarmed, Mabel. We can order it by the barrel, you know.

MABEL. *We?*

HARRY. I forgot. We shan't say "we" any more, shall we? I, then, or my landlady. I suppose it'll come to that.

MABEL (*uneasily*). That's true. You will have to board again.

HARRY. If it's my landlady's outlay for sugar that makes you look so worried, Mabel, you can put your mind at rest. I shall make it up in vinegar. My state of mind will pickle all I eat. (*A silence.*)

MABEL. Harry, don't you think we ought to make up our minds to avoid that kind of thing?

HARRY. What? Indiscriminate pickling?

MABEL (*ignoring his levity*). Of course, I know it's very sad that we thought we could love each other, and then found we couldn't. I feel that as much as you do,—more perhaps; I couldn't laugh about it as you did just now. But don't you see that if we are going to carry out what we made up our minds to last night—what we both feel to be best—we mustn't think of things as we wanted to have them; as—as they used to be.

HARRY. In that case you mustn't ask me if my coffee is sweet enough, dear. That reminds me too much of the little woman who ate her first breakfast in this room with me two years ago.

MABEL (*with vexation*). You shouldn't say that, Harry. That's just what we *mustn't* remember.

HARRY. Is it decent to forget it?

MABEL. We can't afford to be decent.

HARRY. Perhaps you are right, my dear. Decency isn't for people who apply for divorces. When we found out that we were in love, we pretended that we'd loved each other always. Well, we'll balance that fiction by another. We've agreed to hate each other, and we'll assume that our hatred has been from everlasting to everlasting.

MABEL. Hate each other! Oh, how can you be so forgetful, so perverse? You know we agreed last night to be friends, —firm and loyal friends.

HARRY. Did we? That's a large order, as they say. I doubt if I can live up to it in this matter-of-fact next morning. You see, my dear, I perform the most Christian

acts in an improper spirit. I can't even quarrel amiably.

MABEL. You don't realize how you've changed, Harry. Last night you were so sensible. And now—

HARRY. Common sense, as you very well know, is a rare indulgence with me, and I've slept it off like any other debauch.

MABEL. But surely you don't mean—you can't mean—that you want our divorce to be a mere vulgar, hateful squabble, —like the rest of them.

HARRY. A divorce is a divorce, Mabel, and it doesn't change its nature when we want it. A pig would be a pig even if you and I kept it.

MABEL (*gently*). But why should we be angry because we haven't made each other happy? That ought to make us sorry, oughtn't it? We've quarreled because we've been too close to each other, and we want to get farther off so that we may be friends again.

HARRY. Yes, marriage is a narrow double seat in which we've cramped and crowded each other and lost our tempers. But I'm not so sure about the roomy bench of friendship.

MABEL. Surely, Harry, we're not going to part like any teamster and his wife, bawling and scowling at each other. We do nothing that we are ashamed of; we do what we believe to be good and wise; we do it because we love—that is, because we value—one another too much to want to spoil each other's lives. Don't you see that we have only to live up to the dignity of our motives, in order to show the world that divorce need not be what vulgar people have made it? (*With enthusiasm.*) It might be a high example!

HARRY. You seem to think, Mabel, that our divorce is going to exalt us in the eyes of all our friends and acquaintances, not to mention the reading public. No such thing, my dear. If we really cannot live together, we were very foolish two years ago to think we could; and if we can live together, we

are still more foolish now to think we can't. We've made a mess of one of the big things in life, and we shall be treated like any other botchers. The world will gossip and giggle, but it won't come to us for lessons in deportment.

MABEL. Of course, Harry, we've made a mistake—a terrible mistake. But the difference in people comes out in the way they view their mistakes, the way they mend them. We don't have to be enemies because we couldn't be a great deal more than friends. Married people, when they separate, seem to assume that anybody who can't live with them is a monster. But I know you are no monster, and you know —at least I thought you did—that I am none. When we're doing a sensible thing, we don't want to do it in a fit of temper like silly schoolchildren.

HARRY. Schoolchildren are too sensible to try to look amiable when they feel cross. It makes a horrid grimace, a good deal worse than an honest scowl.

MABEL. And you think I would *pretend?* That I want to *hoodwink* people? I didn't expect that even from you.

HARRY. No doubt you mean to be sincere, but you've been captivated by your notion of a dignified and impressive separation. You won't have any divorce of the old-fashioned tooth-and-claw variety. No, you want a pretty little lapdog of a divorce with silky fur and a pink bow tied to its collar that you can handle and dandle before admiring visitors. I can't help you in that, my dear. I'm humanly dismal and humanly vexed, and I don't care to have the public think that I'm inhumanly philosophical.

MABEL. You are unjust, Harry! You are cruelly unjust!

HARRY. Shouldn't you like to send out announcement cards to our friends? We might give a reception; we could call it a house-cooling, the opposite of a house-warming, you know. We would stand up side by side at the entrance to the parlors, and receive the congratulations of our friends, and at

the end we could part with a long embrace amid the sobs of the assembled company.

MABEL. If you don't wish me to despise you utterly, Harry—

HARRY. That's right! That's what I want! Give me honest abuse—I deserve it, and it will do me good—not pinchbeck magnanimity. Most women get married in order to show how beautiful they can look. I verily believe, Mabel, that you want a divorce in order to show how charmingly you can act.

MABEL. Oh, you are brutal!

HARRY. I've noticed that affected people call anything brutal that doesn't fall in with their pet affectation.

MABEL. And I've noticed that brutal people call anything affected that doesn't suit their particular brutality.

HARRY. My dear, we are wasting on the furniture and dishes these precious proofs of our incompatibility of temper. It's a pity we couldn't subpœna the teaspoons and bread-plates. The divorce would be granted on the spot.

MABEL (*almost breaking down*). Yes, you are right. You've had your way. You've lowered me in my own eyes. You've made me hateful to myself. I wanted to be peaceable and generous and friendly, and I've been excited and quarrelsome and abusive. You've made me just like anyone—you've made me like yourself. (*She pushes her chair from the table, and rests her hand upon her arm, which is supported by the chairback. Pause.*) I'm not going to cry, Harry. You needn't be afraid. It's beyond that.

HARRY (*after a long silence, during which he has risen and paced the room, casting on his wife looks of mingled pity and anger in which pity gradually obtains the upper hand*). Mabel, if it would be any comfort to you to ring for John and order him to flog me, I shouldn't oppose the idea.

MABEL. No, it's very obliging of you, Harry, but I don't think I should enjoy it.

HARRY. I should.

MABEL. Never mind. There can't be much more of this. We shall have parted in a day or two.

HARRY (*resuming his seat, after another silence*). Where had you planned to go, Mabel?

MABEL. Oh, to mamma's—it's the only place. I had thought of Mildred, but—

HARRY. But what?

MABEL. I didn't want to keep you from seeing Jack.

HARRY. Oh, that's nothing. Men can see each other anywhere. Besides, I plan to go to Europe.

MABEL (*pursuing her own thought*). And, then, you see, I didn't want to take my trouble—our trouble—into the midst of their happiness. It would be sad for all of us.

HARRY. Perhaps you are right. (*They sit for a few minutes in silence, which is broken by a ring at the front door.*)

MABEL (*rising*). It's the postman. Shall I bring your letters here?

HARRY. Yes, please. (*Mabel steps into the hall, and returns immediately with letters and papers.*)

MABEL. There's a letter from Jack for you, Harry; nothing else but bills and circulars. You don't want them, I suppose?

HARRY. No, I thank you. Just give me the old boy's letter. (*Mabel brings him a letter, which he deposits unopened beside his plate.*)

MABEL. You aren't ill, Harry?

HARRY. No, I'm perfectly well. I'll read the letter in a moment.

MABEL (*cutting open a letter, which she has kept in her hand*). Mine is from Mildred. It's odd they should write on the same day. (*Mabel sits down to read her letter; Harry stirs his coffee mechanically from time to time, or glances dully at the unopened letter from Jack. A suppressed exclama-*

tion from Mabel causes him to look up. She reads on with increasing agitation, which culminates in an outcry.) Harry!

HARRY. Well?

MABEL. Mildred and Jack—

HARRY. Yes?

MABEL. Mildred and Jack have quarreled.

HARRY. Oh, *their* quarrels!

MABEL. No, no, it's serious. They want a divorce.

HARRY (*leaning back in his chair, and staring at Mabel*). Mabel! Are they out of their senses? Or are you?

MABEL. No, no, it's true. It's perfectly frantic, but it's true. Harry, why don't you open that letter? That's the other side—Jack's side—don't you see?

HARRY (*opening his letter*). I haven't heard Mildred's side yet.

MABEL. There's a clergyman in the case. Isn't that disreputable? If I were going to be interested in anybody who wasn't my husband, I'd rather have a bricklayer than a clergyman.

HARRY. Who is he?

MABEL (*searching in her letter*). He's an evangelist—a Congregationalist from Denver. His name is Raymond St. Clair.

HARRY. That sounds bad. The honest men have homelier names. Well, he hasn't run off with Mildred, has he?

MABEL. That's very coarse of you, Harry. Of course he hasn't run off with her.

HARRY. Only with her common sense?

MABEL (*divided between her wish to rebuke the phrase and to get on with the subject*). Ye-e-es. There's a page and a half of—

HARRY. Exclamation points?

MABEL (*smiling in spite of herself*). About that. She talks about his "lofty spirituality" and his "beautiful unselfishness" and there's a good deal about "opening worlds" and "broadened horizons." She says—you know the kind of

thing, Harry—just what a woman would say! Shall I read the whole?

HARRY. Thanks. I prefer the summary. Besides, the mere bulk of the praise is conclusive. It's only the humbugs that need a page and a half of ecstasy to introduce them.

MABEL. Does Jack call him a humbug?

HARRY. I forgot Jack. Let me see. (*Reading.*) "As my oldest and dearest friend, I feel that I ought not to hide from you the painful fact that there has been a difficulty between Mildred and myself which seems likely to result in permanent separation." If Jack wasn't ashamed of himself, he wouldn't write like Webster's Unabridged. (*Reading.*) "The cause of the trouble is one Raymond St. Clair, a so-called traveling evangelist, in reality a dead-beat and mountebank who manages to earn an excellent income by duping women and bleeding their husbands."

MABEL. Dear Jack! He's so energetic. (*Resuming her letter.*) Mildred says that the lower elements of the town banded together to slander Mr. St. Clair and drive him out of the place. Then Jack forbade him the house. (*Reads on to herself, then asks suddenly.*) What does Jack say about that, love? (*Harry starts involuntarily.*) Oh, excuse me, Harry! I didn't mean anything by it—I didn't really.

HARRY (*magnanimously*). Oh, I'll excuse you as long as you're quite sure you didn't *mean* anything by it. Jack says he looked up the man's record—an ugly story—up two or three times before the police courts—forbade him to come to the house and ordered Mildred not to see him.

MABEL. Does he say "ordered"?

HARRY. No, he says "requested." You and I know what Jack's requests are when he's excited.

MABEL. Go on with Jack's letter. There's no end to Mildred's.

HARRY (*reading*). "The man paid farewell visits to his fa-

vored disciples, and I returned home yesterday to find my wife exchanging confidences with the blackleg. The man left the house at a speed to which his own fears and my boot-toe materially contributed. Of course I spoke my mind to Mildred." Yes, I'll warrant he spoke his mind, the block-head!

MABEL. I think he was quite justified. Mildred was odious.

HARRY. What does she say about it?

MABEL (*reading*). "Jack's violence was terrific. He swore at Mr. St. Clair, and drove him out of the house. Then he turned on me. You can't imagine his fury. Living as you do with a husband who is all tenderness and goodness"—

HARRY (*quickly*). Go on, dear! Go on!

MABEL. I've lost my place. Oh, yes. (*With much deliberation.*) "Living as you do with a husband who is all tenderness and goodness, you have no idea of the way Jack acts when he gives way to his fits of passion." There's a good deal more of it.

HARRY. Let's see what Jack says. (*Reading to himself and muttering.*) H'm! H'm! The deuce!

MABEL. Oh, there isn't anything more! There can't be! Harry, what has she done?

HARRY. She went to see this—evangelist—at his house.

MABEL. And then?

HARRY. Then there was—Pandemonium. No, he doesn't say "Pandemonium." He says: "I explained to her what she owed to me as my wife and to society as a respectable woman." There's a postscript. He's coming up on the five o'clock.

MABEL. Jack wants to talk it over with us. And Mildred—he leaves her at home?

HARRY. He doesn't say. Perhaps your letter tells. Look at the end of it. (*They look uneasily at each other. Mabel fumbles among the closing sheets of the letter with mounting agitation.*)

MABEL. If it should turn out— What nonsense! (*Her eye is caught by a paragraph. She reads, then cries out.*) Harry! It's true! (*She rises and goes excitedly to her husband. She makes a movement as if to clasp his neck, recollects herself, and retreats, laying her hands on the back of an empty chair.*) *She's coming too.*

HARRY (*in a low voice*). When?

MABEL. By the twelve o'clock. (*Harry whistles: long silence.*)

HARRY. We could telegraph to one—or both. The domestic plant supplies all the quarreling we can handle.

MABEL (*who has been thinking earnestly and now speaks with decision*). Harry, we'll let them come. There's something symbolic in it all. I can't express it, but—don't you see? —they're trying to escape from each other, and they're running right into each other's arms. That shows how it'll all turn out. It makes our task a little harder, but in the end perhaps it will help.

HARRY. Our task? What task?

MABEL. Why, reconciling them.

HARRY. Good heavens!

MABEL. You don't mean that you and I could let them go on with this scandalous idea?

HARRY. Scandalous! What are *we* doing?

MABEL. Our case is very different. Mildred and Jack are a pair of naughty children, and they shan't have a divorce. Because a grown person may be trusted with an automobile, it doesn't follow that a child should have one.

HARRY. I should like to hear you tell Jack that he wasn't grown up.

MABEL. I shouldn't tell Jack. Jack is too young to be told how young he is.

HARRY. But, Mabel—in our position—could we have the face to bring them together?

MABEL. Could we have the heart to let them separate? I wish

you wouldn't drag our difficulties into the matter, Harry. This affair is serious.

HARRY. I beg your pardon. I forgot that ours was a joke.

MABEL (*not heeding him*). They're both crazy. They simply worship each other. I see just how it has all come about. Mildred is one of those women who must have somebody or something to romanticize and poetcize the world for them.

HARRY. A demand which Jack is about as fit to meet as a Newfoundland dog.

MABEL. While they were engaged, she didn't feel any lack; the relation was enough. After marriage it was different: when a woman has been married two years, it's no longer poetry just to live with her husband.

HARRY. No—by that time it's prose—or drama.

MABEL. Of course Jack couldn't dress up her life for her. He thought of nothing but to work for her and cherish her like the greathearted fellow he is—

HARRY. Oh!

MABEL. So she had to find a magician of some kind or other. I think it was outrageous to choose that sort of man, but she didn't love him. She isn't that kind of fool.

HARRY. The rest is clear enough. Jack, of course,—like the blessed numskull that he is—cuts in with his blunderbuss methods. They don't work; and the less they work the harder he lays them on.

MABEL. Jack could do no less than he did. If I acted as Mildred has done, I should despise my husband for not *beating* me. No one could imagine from her soft ways how stubborn and rebellious Mildred can be.

HARRY. No, Mildred isn't stubborn or rebellious, if you mean by that that she takes her own way because it *is* her own way or because it isn't Jack's. She's all impulse, and when her impulses are strong, she's uncontrollable. But it isn't herself that she stands for. It's only her feeling.

MABEL. The fact remains that you can do nothing with her.

HARRY. Not by bellowing at her, as Jack does. Now, look here, Mabel, she meant no harm in receiving that man or in going to his rooms. She thought he was a martyr, and the chance to comfort a martyr was too precious to be lost. If Jack had had a thimbleful of brains—I agree with you, my dear, that Jack isn't old enough to be divorced. I think he isn't old enough to be married.

MABEL. Jack was perfectly right in being stern with her.

HARRY. What a wife you would have made for Jack!

MABEL. What a husband you would have made for Mildred! (*They both laugh. After a pause.*) We must waste no more time. They'll be here in a few hours. We must arrange our plans.

HARRY. That means I am to listen?

MABEL. If you don't mind. They mustn't meet, if we can help it. Jack can dine with you and me downstairs, and I shall send Mildred's dinner up to the second floor. That part is very easy. She will be too tired and distressed to want to see people and I shall tell her we have company to dinner. That is quite true. We have Jack.

HARRY. Of course it's true.

MABEL. Not that it would matter if it weren't.

HARRY. Of course not.

MABEL. You'll have to amuse Jack. But I want you to come up and talk with Mildred and me for a little while after dinner. You can excuse yourself to him. Give Jack a cigar and the "Science Monthly," and he won't know whether you've been away ten minutes or two hours.

HARRY. Quite right.

MABEL. You needn't stay with Mildred more than twenty minutes. I want you to talk to her about Jack; I want you to abuse him. You're good at that, you know.

HARRY. Oh, yes, my friends can always count on me for any little good turns of that nature.

MABEL. If any one else abuses Jack, she will defend him. That will divert her indignation toward you.

HARRY. I think I follow you.

MABEL. Then I shall be very affectionate toward you, Harry, —in her presence, I mean—and you must be as affectionate toward me as you can. That will show her how nice it is for married people to love each other.

HARRY. Exactly.

MABEL. You won't mind my fondling you a little, Harry? Just as a matter of form, you know.

HARRY (*courageously*). Oh, no, not at all! Anything for the cause!

MABEL. We must act in the same way with Jack. Of course it wouldn't be delicate to overdo it.

HARRY. Of course not. We mustn't flaunt our happiness in their faces.

MABEL. Mildred has behaved scandalously, but I shall tell her that I think she has been perfectly right. You might do the same with Jack. When you wish to persuade people that they are in the wrong, you must begin by admitting that they are in the right. That makes them respect your opinion, and they'll listen to you.

HARRY. My dear, you are a perfect Jesuit.

MABEL (*thoughtfully*). That's all I think of just now. (*With condescending emphasis on the pronoun.*) Perhaps *you* can suggest something, Harry.

HARRY. I thought I might look a little further into the story of this Raymond St. Clair. Something might turn up that would help to bring Mildred round.

MABEL. That is charming of you, Harry. Only you mustn't get your information from Jack. She would say that Jack had poisoned your mind.

HARRY. Jack hasn't poisoned the minds of the detectives and chiefs of police. I shall go to them for my information.

MABEL. Then it's all settled.

HARRY. What becomes of our divorce in the mean time?

MABEL. Oh, that'll have to be put off.

HARRY. I suppose so.

MABEL. Oh, Harry, you won't mind a little delay? Why, for Jack and Mildred's sake, (*she searches her mind for a crushing superlative*) I could stay with you for *six months.*

HARRY. Oh, if it comes to that—*noblesse oblige*—I daresay I shall hold out.

MABEL. *We'll sustain each other.*

HARRY. By-the-by, Mabel, you know that a little while back you were trying to touch up our divorce a little, to give it a kind of moral send-off.

MABEL (*dubiously*). Yes.

HARRY. And it wouldn't work owing to my confounded stiffneckedness and perversity?

MABEL (*with more interest*). Yes.

HARRY. Couldn't we get something of the same kind out of our work for Jack and Mildred? We might make it a—a thank offering.

MABEL (*with dawning sympathy*). I don't quite see—

HARRY. Why, you see, if we postpone our felicity in order to help somebody else, our happiness will be as it were the wages of a good deed. We will earn our deliverance.

MABEL (*with beaming eyes, oblivious of his irony*). Yes, Harry, yes!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Place: a parlor on the second floor of the Walton house. A double doorway at the back gives a view through its widely parted curtains of a corridor large enough to afford space for a short promenade. Elegant but not showy furniture. Table in the centre of the room. To the right of the table a deep and roomy easy-chair. To the left of the table a long sofa, so placed as to command a view of the doorway opening into the corridor, yet allowing the faces of the occupants to be clearly seen by the audience. Piano at back right. Time: 7:30 P.M. *of the same day.*

Mildred Beresford and Mabel Walton are visible as the curtain rises. The former reclines in the easy-chair. She is slight in frame, with a face now pale from weariness and excitement, the whiteness of the small, clear-cut features set off by the dark hair and dark eyes. The eyes are weary, but suggest the brilliance they assume in moments of animation. Her movements are agile and very swift; they alternate with periods of complete passivity. Mabel Walton sits at the end of the sofa nearest to the table, working at some delicate embroidery.

MILDRED. It was so good of you to have my dinner sent upstairs. You always think of the right things, Mabel.

MABEL. I knew you wouldn't want to see people to-night.

MILDRED. Oh, *no!* (*A pause.*) Who is your guest, Mabel?

MABEL. He's a scientific man, some one Harry picked up long ago at the seaside.

MILDRED. Is he pleasant?

MABEL. Harry and I find him very nice. I don't believe you would like him much. You would think him too masterful.

MILDRED. Oh, I shouldn't mind that at all. I love to be controlled. Whenever I find a beautiful nature, I want to be its *slave.*

MABEL. I'm afraid I don't often find beauty in the natures of people who want to control me.

MILDRED. *I* do. You ought to have seen me with Mr. St. Clair. I obeyed his slightest wish.

MABEL (*hesitating*). And Jack?

MILDRED (*with an effect of precipitate and measureless descent*). Oh, Jack! (*Pause.*) Mabel, Mabel dearest, *tell* me that you think I've done right! Tell me again! Tell me a dozen times!

MABEL. Yes, yes, dear. I'll say it a dozen times, if you want me to. (*Rises and goes to Mildred.*) But you mustn't get excited. You must rest. (*Strokes her forehead.*)

MILDRED (*putting her arms round Mabel's neck and drawing her head down*). Oh, it has been so hard, so hard! If it hadn't been for you to come to, to take care of me, to tell me that I hadn't *done wrong*, I couldn't have lived through it, Mabel.

MABEL. There! There! Don't think of it, my poor dear. (*Pause.*)

MILDRED (*nervously*). Will they come up here?

MABEL. No, not the stranger. Harry's coming up to talk to you for a minute, if you'd like to see him.

MILDRED. Oh, yes, I never mind Harry. I mean I'm always very glad to see him.

MABEL. He'll be up as soon as they've finished their dessert.

MILDRED. Mabel, do you and Harry ever—quarrel?

MABEL. Yes indeed.

MILDRED. I'm so *glad* you quarrel.

MABEL. Then you've every reason to be happy. Harry is often very exasperating.

MILDRED. How perfectly delightful!

MABEL. You had better try it first.

MILDRED. I don't see how anyone could ask for anything more delicious than to be just spurned and trampled on by one's husband and then forgive him! (*Observing Mabel, who gazes at her in real astonishment.*) Of course I don't mean such things as *Jack* does. I mean just to be spurned and trampled comfortably, you know.

MABEL. I never was spurned and trampled comfortably. No doubt it would be very agreeable.

MILDRED. You don't love to forgive as I do, Mabel.

MABEL. No, perhaps not.

MILDRED. Then how do you and Harry make it up when you quarrel?

MABEL. Why, you see, when Harry is exasperating, I am very angry; but when I think how he must suffer if I am as exasperating as he is, I feel very sorry for him. He feels just the same way. It's a sort of fellowship, you see.

MILDRED (*thoughtfully*). I never thought about it in that way. You see Jack never gave me any time to think about his sufferings. He kept me too busy with my own.

MABEL. The more he hurt you the more he hurt himself.

MILDRED. He's had a very hard time, then.

MABEL (*tenderly, answering the implication rather than the words*). I know, dear. (*Trying to change the subject.*) Besides, Harry and I find a sort of shelter in each other's imperfections. We shouldn't either of us want a paragon for a housemate. Perfection asks too much.

MILDRED. Jack never troubled me in that way.

MABEL. Then if one only thinks of the other's faults as an appeal to one's generosity, it makes one glad to be a little injured.

MILDRED (*with enthusiasm*). Oh, that is beautiful. That is just what I have said a thousand times. I've urged Jack to be harsh to me. And he never would—until—

MABEL. Until he overdid it. Yes, dear. People don't know where to stop.

MILDRED. Mabel, there is one thing that troubles me a little. I don't like to think of Jack—alone there—you understand—to-night—in our house. He wouldn't go *away,* you know; he couldn't. Perhaps he'll sit there and wait for me.

MABEL. Surely you told him you were going.

MILDRED. No, not exactly. He knew generally that I might

start at any time, but I didn't leave any note when I started.

MABEL. Why not?

MILDRED. Oh, people always write such silly and melodramatic notes when they run away like that. I wrote two or three and tore them up. That's very stagy, too, don't you think so?—to write notes and tear them up. One should be sensible and businesslike in leaving one's husband just as one is in other matters. I am very practical, Mabel.

MABEL (*with perfect gravity*). So I should think.

MILDRED. Of course I don't mean that one need to be a *stone* in order to be practical.

MABEL. I don't think you're at all stony.

MILDRED. I didn't forget a single thing about the house. And I told Elise—Elise is the new cook, you know— It's a pretty name—don't you think? I took her partly on that account. I told her to be sure to ice the sherbet for Jack and not to sugar his chocolate. He hates sugar in his chocolate.

MABEL. And you really took all that trouble for a man you were going to leave?

MILDRED. Oh, no, it just took itself. (*Enter Harry.*) Oh, Harry, Harry! (*She rises with a gentle and pathetic eagerness to greet him.*)

HARRY. No, no, don't get up, Mildred. (*He presses her hand.*) We're so very glad to see you.

MILDRED. Oh, you are too good, Harry,—both of you. You are all I have left now, you and Mabel.

HARRY. And you're all ours now, little one. We shan't share you with anybody—not even Jack. (*He drops her hand gently, and places himself behind the sofa, resting his arms upon the back. In this attitude he strokes his wife's hair from time to time with a playfully affectionate movement. She glances up smilingly into his face. Mildred watches them with interest.*)

MILDRED. Is he very interesting to-night?

HARRY. He?

MILDRED. Your guest, I mean—your scientific friend?

HARRY (*after a quick interchange of looks with Mabel*). No —he's rather out of spirits—rather glum.

MILDRED (*casually*). Is he married?

HARRY (*starting*). Why,—

MABEL (*quickly*). Of course he's married.

MILDRED (*still casually*). Why isn't his wife here, then?

HARRY. Why, the fact is—he and his wife are not on good terms. They don't live together.

MILDRED. Oh! (*After a pause, with some dignity*). Jack and I avoid such people.

MABEL (*to create a diversion*). Harry, you must really sit down. Anybody but Mildred would think we weren't married.

HARRY. Very well, my dear. May I sit on the sofa, or am I banished to the window-seat?

MABEL. You may sit on the *other end* of the sofa.

HARRY. That would have been a long way off two years ago.

MABEL. Two years ago is itself a long way off.

HARRY (*sitting down at the other end of the sofa*). Why are you putting up your embroidery?

MABEL. It's time to stop. A woman's work never gets on in the company of a man.

HARRY. It's like a man's work in the company of a woman.

MABEL. Embroidery can always wait.

HARRY. There's a drop of blood on your hand. You've pricked your finger.

MABEL. It's nothing.

HARRY. It's a drop of blood. (*With concern.*) Let me wipe it off. (*Mabel gives him her hand. He draws out his handkerchief and slowly removes the drop. The process gives occasion for sundry affectionate little pressures, which are never indiscreetly emphasized. Mildred watches them intently. Her eyes suddenly fill with tears. In the effort to hide her feeling, she rises and goes to the piano, where she*

stands, fingering the sheets of music, with her back to Harry and Mabel.)

MABEL (*in a low tone, withdrawing her hand*). You needn't keep it up, Harry. She isn't looking.

HARRY. I only wanted to keep in practice.

MABEL. You don't need any practice. You act only too naturally. (*Mildred leaves the piano, and approaches Harry and Mabel with an appealing look.*)

MILDRED. You mustn't think that I don't like—that I don't *love*—to see you fond like that of one another. It's all in the world I have left to care about. If anything came between you—there, don't laugh at me!—Jack and I would have laughed at anybody who said that about us once—if you ever stopped caring for each other, I couldn't go on living. I was foolish just now. I thought of him—of the old times—of the four of us, and I couldn't—

HARRY (*leading her back to the easy-chair*). Poor little girl!

MABEL. Harry thinks you've acted very right, Mildred. He was very earnest about it this morning.

MILDRED. Does he? Oh, that is so good.

HARRY. You were right in every particular.

MILDRED (*with shining eyes*). Do you think so?

HARRY. No self-respecting woman could have done less.

MILDRED. That's just what I told myself. But it's so much better to hear you say it.

HARRY. Jack has acted very badly.

MILDRED (*gratefully*). Oh, I *knew* you were my friend!

HARRY. To bully and browbeat a tender and trusting woman!

MILDRED (*this time without enthusiasm*). Yes.

HARRY. It was a coward's act.

MILDRED (*after a pause*). I'm not quite sure that I like to hear you call Jack a coward, Harry. Of course it's very dear of you, but—

HARRY. It was unmanly! It was revolting.

MILDRED (*with dignity*). You are violent, Harry.

HARRY. He is no gentleman.

MILDRED (*indignantly*). No gentleman! You call him no gentleman? He would scorn to do the things that others do. Jack doesn't slander his friends.

HARRY. My friends cease to be friends when they turn scoundrels.

MILDRED (*with flashing eyes*). Do you forget that Jack is my husband?

HARRY (*as if cowed*). I beg your pardon. I thought—

MILDRED (*passionately*). You thought you were free to blacken and revile him because I left his house. You thought that his wife would be silent while you spoke lies about him behind his back. Suppose I have left his house? Whose affair is that but mine—but ours—my husband's and mine? No one shall say a word against him in my presence,—no one who doesn't love him as I do!

MABEL (*going to her*). My dearest! Harry didn't mean—

MILDRED (*hiding her head with her hands*). Oh, no, no! I know he didn't. I'm all wicked—all wrong. Forgive me, Harry. Why don't you turn me out of the house? Why don't you send for the policeman to put me out?

MABEL. Dearest girl, do you suppose Harry minds what you've said? Harry and I are here to be called names or scolded or knocked about or anything else that will do you good. But you mustn't talk any more to-night. You must get to your room and rest. Come, dear! (*With some persuasion, she leads Mildred from the room.*)

(*Harry, left alone, takes some papers—letters and newspaper clippings—from a pocket-book, and spreads them upon the table. He is in the midst of this task when Mabel reenters. She approaches Harry eagerly, and stands behind him, resting both hands upon his shoulders.*)

MABEL. It's coming out right, Harry. We've been cruel to her, abominable—but it's coming out right. And you've

been so helpful, so tactful, through it all! I'd like to—(*makes a sudden movement, but draws back*) no, I won't either.

HARRY (*affecting unconsciousness of her movement*). There are some things here that may interest you, Mabel,—some things about Mildred's clerical admirer.

MABEL (*with intense interest*). What *has* he done?

HARRY. He's done several things. Here are reports of several arrests for drunkenness, and two or three entanglements with women, and one case that seems next door to forgery.

MABEL. And you've found out all that in this short time, and brought the papers! Oh Harry, how clever you are! (*Bends down impulsively, and kisses him.*) There! I've done it! It's perfectly *shameless* of me, but I couldn't help it, and it's the last time.

HARRY. Oh, very well, since it's the last time. (*With dignity.*) I couldn't tolerate many repetitions of that kind of thing, Mabel.

MABEL (*abjectly*). Oh, no, no! It's angelic in you to forgive me even this time.

HARRY (*arranging and folding the papers*). I shall hand this over to you, Mabel, and you can show it to Mildred when you think best. (*Tentatively.*) She's very tired to-night.

MABEL (*slowly*). I don't know about to-night. Give me the papers. I'm going back to her, and I'll see how she feels. You must go and fetch Jack, Harry. Bring him up here. It's cosier than that lonely downstairs parlor. I'll be back as soon as Mildred's quiet. (*They go out by different doors. The room remains solitary for a short time. Steps are heard from the staircase and corridor, and Harry reappears, ushering in Jack Beresford. The latter is generously proportioned, above middle height, broadshouldered, erect, with black hair and eyes, quiet movements, and a deliberate, low-keyed voice. He gives the impression of simple manliness, and an*

habitual geniality yielding place at long intervals to outbreaks of passion.)

HARRY. Sit down, Jack. (*Jack seats himself in the easy-chair vacated by Mildred; Harry returns to the sofa.*) Mabel won't mind your smoking. She'll be back in a moment. She has to put to bed that invalid friend of hers.

JACK (*politely, but without interest*). Ah, yes.

HARRY. Were you lonesome downstairs?

JACK (*slowly*). No, I think I tried to be lonesome and couldn't.

HARRY (*gently*). Mildred?

JACK (*after a pause*). Yes. The place is—crammed with her.

HARRY. She had a way of filling any place she happened to be in. Mabel and I shouldn't have left you so long alone.

JACK. Harry, to be blunt with you, I don't know whether it makes things worse or better to be with you and Mabel. I'm not an imaginative fellow, as you know; yet as we three sat there at dinner to-night, with the fourth place—the place where she always sat—empty—

HARRY (*sympathetically*). Yes, I know.

JACK. I felt—as if I were dining by an open grave.

HARRY (*very quietly*). I know.

JACK. And when we came upstairs just now, I caught myself looking back to see if she weren't following us. (*Mabel enters, smiles at Jack by way of greeting, and sits down at the vacant end of the sofa.*) It's the same in here. I'm turning hypochondriac. I could fancy that Mildred had been in this room to-night, that she'd just risen from this chair.

HARRY. Why, Jack!

JACK (*recovering himself a little*). I know what it is now. There's a scent of heliotrope in the room. She always wore heliotropes.

MABEL. Yes, that accounts for it. We had a bunch in the room this morning. (*After a pause.*) It's hard all round,

Jack. Of course you know I think you're perfectly justified, and if Mildred can't act like a good wife and a decent woman, you ought to send her away; but it's cruel for you and her, and it's very hard for Harry and me.

HARRY. You see, Jack, we've been so close to each other that there's been a sort of marriage, as you might say, among the four of us.

JACK (*with deliberate earnestness*). It *has* been like that, Harry.

HARRY. Of course Mildred will come to us, and you'll come to us. Mabel and I can't give up the best fellow and the dearest girl in the world, because they've made up their minds to give up each other. But we feel that in not having you together we lose about half of each of you. It'll be just as it's been to-night. There'll always be one too few or one too many, we shan't quite know which.

JACK. I can stay away altogether if you wish.

MABEL. That isn't like you, Jack. It isn't friendly.

JACK. No, it wasn't friendly, Mabel, and I was ungenerous to say it. But I don't see how else we shall redress the balance unless— (*He smiles faintly.*)

HARRY. Well?

JACK (*with forced pleasantry*). Unless you and Mabel should get a divorce. (*Slight start from Harry and Mabel; they resume their composure at once, and laugh gently.*)

MABEL (*laying her hand on Harry's shoulder*). Harry, do you want a divorce from me?

HARRY (*capturing the hand*). I can wait till you're ready. (*Jack watches them thoughtfully.*)

MABEL. Personally, of course, I shouldn't mind, but I shouldn't like to make this little boy miserable.

HARRY. And I couldn't break this little girl's heart.

MABEL (*resuming her serious tone*). There's another way, Jack, in which the situation makes us anxious. Mildred has always been impulsive and reckless. It has been a great

comfort to Harry and me to feel that she was in the hands of a man a little older than herself, a man of judgment and experience and (*she avoids Harry's eye*)—balanced temper. (*Jack smiles faintly.*) She's going to lose this support.

HARRY. Because she's proved that she needs it. It's as if one dropped a child's hand because its tottering made it hard to walk with.

JACK (*with feeling*). Do you mean—

MABEL (*with a reproving glance at Harry*). No, we don't mean anything disagreeable to you. You've been quite right, but that doesn't make it easier for Mildred. Now this Mr. St. Clair—

JACK (*grating his teeth*). The scoundrel!

MABEL. Mildred doesn't really care a pin for him. She's taken with him in just the same way that she might be taken with Rostand or Maeterlinck.

HARRY. Better say with Bataille or D'Annunzio.

MABEL (*severely*). I don't read Bataille or D'Annunzio. These little caprices—

JACK. Little caprices! She fairly raved about the mountebank.

HARRY. Yes, and she'll rave to-morrow about a new sunshade or a jardinière. It's all one.

MABEL (*pointing a warning finger at Harry*). Call them what you please, Jack. They can't hurt her as long as she has her love for you to hold by. But if she loses that, they might—you see what I mean.

JACK. I see what you mean, but there's nothing in it. Mildred cares nothing for me. A woman who loved her husband wouldn't lower herself and him by private visits to charlatans at their rooms.

MABEL. She would, if she were Mildred.

JACK. You think I don't know my own wife?

MABEL. You don't know her, Jack, if you think she doesn't love you. We don't want to change anything of course.

We both have faith in your wisdom and justice, and we know it's irreparable, and you couldn't stoop to take her back after all this, merely because she loved you, and needed your protection. But it makes a new anxiety for us.

JACK. Mabel, do you mean that I'm throwing a poor girl who loves me into the arms of the (*half-choking*) St. Clairs?

MABEL. Nobody can tell, Jack.

JACK. If I thought that— (*He breaks off and lapses into meditation. Brief silence. Mabel and Harry exchange glances. A noise is heard overhead, and heard again more than once at short intervals. Mabel rises.*)

MABEL. I think my friend is stirring. Excuse me for a moment, Jack.

HARRY (*also rising*). I want to be excused for a second, too, old chap. There's a chauffeur who doesn't always heed instructions.

JACK. Oh, don't mind me. Turn off some of that light, will you, Harry? (*Harry reduces the light to a single glimmer, and follows Mabel out of the room. Jack remains for some moments absorbed in thought. He rises, and traverses the room two or three times with slow, meditative steps. He stops before the table, opens a book casually at the fly-leaf, reads the inscription, and drops it with a look of pain. He approaches the mantelpiece, running his eye along the bric-à-brac until it is stopped by a photograph, which he takes up, scrutinizes, and replaces almost tenderly. He starts to seat himself in another chair, beside which on the floor a small, dull-colored object arrests his glance. He picks up a spray of heliotrope with a start of recognition or association, and sits down, clasping it in his fingers. Once he raises it to his lips. Placing his arms upon the table, the spray of heliotrope still faintly visible in the tightened fingers of the right hand, he lays his head upon his outstretched arms. Perfect stillness for several seconds.*

Mildred appears in the doorway. Seeing no one at first in the dim light, she moves softly and noiselessly toward the easy-chair in which she has been sitting, gropes in its recesses, and extracts after a little search a small pocket-handkerchief. She is about to withdraw when her eye is caught by the motionless arms and head upon the table. She calls "Harry" twice very faintly, and, receiving no answer, approaches on tiptoe till she is close enough to recognize her husband. A quick spasm traverses her frame. She darts back to the door with the swiftness and silence of a cat, but pauses, trembling, on the threshold, and looking back into the dimly lit and soundless room. By another fleet and noiseless movement, she reaches her husband's side, is about to speak, pauses, reflects, is on the point of retreating when she observes the spray of heliotrope. Her face lightens, and she flings herself with an energy that is almost violence upon her husband.)

MILDRED (*sobbing*). Jack! Jack! I want to come back! I want to come back! It's Mildred! Don't you hear? It's Mildred, your wife, who loves you with all her wicked, wicked little heart.

JACK. Mildred! (*He opens his arms, takes her up, and allows his embrace to close round her, not rapidly, but with quiet finality.*) It's to stay now, dearest.

MILDRED. I know you hate me, Jack.

JACK (*tenderly*). Yes, dear, I hate you. You see I do, don't you? (*Kisses her.*)

MILDRED. Oh, Jack, I want you to be a *brute* to me. I won't come back unless you promise that you'll be a perfect brute to me.

JACK. I don't need to promise that. With me that'll take care of itself.

MILDRED. And you mustn't let me smile at anybody or look at anybody or speak to anybody in the wide, wide world but you. I'm a very bad person, and I want you to be

very, very stern with me. I want you to make me quail. *Will* you make me quail, Jack?

JACK. Yes, yes, little one. And Mr. St. Clair? You don't care for him any more?

MILDRED (*with a shudder of disgust*). Mr. St. Clair! Why, what kind of woman do you take me for, Jack? I have heard such things about that man. (*With gentle reproof.*) Really, dear, I don't think he's quite a fit person for you and me to talk about.

JACK (*smiling, but relieved*). No, little woman, he isn't. (*A rustle is heard. They turn and see Harry and Mabel smiling at them from the portière. A moment of happy embarrassment follows.*)

MILDRED (*leaving Jack and advancing toward Harry and Mabel*). He's very nice, your scientific man.

MABEL. So you've made his acquaintance, Mildred?

MILDRED. Yes, I've made his acquaintance. But there's one thing you were quite wrong about, Harry. He and his wife are on the best of terms. When you have him to dinner again, you may include her in the invitation. (*During the last three speeches Mabel embraces Mildred, Harry and Jack shake hands.*)

MABEL. And now, Mildred, you really must—

MILDRED. Oh, Mabel, I know I must, but I can't.

MABEL. Dear, you are very, very tired—far more tired than you think; and if you don't go upstairs at once—

MILDRED. I shall stay up all night.

MABEL. Jack, speak to her. You're her husband.

JACK. That's just why I don't speak to her.

MILDRED. Do *you* want me to go, Jack?

JACK. I *do* think you're rather tired, Mildred.

MABEL. That settles it. When a man thinks a woman's rather tired, every other woman knows that she's ready to drop.

MILDRED. Oh, very well. We'll just take two or three turns in

the corridor, and then I'll go upstairs. I'm so happy. You don't know how I pity poor stupid married people like Harry and you, Mabel, who never quarrel, and never think of a divorce. They lose half the happiness of married life. Come, Jack. (*They pass into the corridor. During the ensuing dialogue, as they pace the corridor, their figures in the doorway become visible, at nearly equal intervals, to Harry and Mabel, who have seated themselves on the sofa with looks in which satisfaction and exhaustion mingle.*)

MABEL. It's been a good day's work, Harry.

HARRY (*wiping his forehead*). It's been a hard day's work.

MABEL (*sympathetically*). You're tired, too? No wonder. You've helped so much. You've been perfect, Harry.

HARRY. Have I? No wonder I'm tired.

MABEL. You'll have your reward now. We can get on with our divorce. That'll please you.

HARRY (*unenthusiastically*). Oh, yes, I'm delighted with that. And you?

MABEL (*tepidly*). I'm very glad.

HARRY. It's a unique sort of joy, isn't it? One that one couldn't share with many people.

MABEL. One could hardly share it fully with more than one person.

HARRY. That's just what I was thinking. The only person who could really sympathize with the emancipated wife would be—

MABEL. The emancipated husband.

HARRY. That's it. I should really think we ought to meet now and then to congratulate each other on the bliss of being separated.

MABEL. What odd things you do say, Harry! I like your nonsense to-night.

HARRY. I wish you always liked nonsense.

MABEL. Why?

HARRY. So that you might always like me.

MABEL. I'm sure I respect you very much.

HARRY. Respect is a polar word. It's out of place this side of Spitzbergen.

MABEL (*pointedly*). I should always value *your* respect.

HARRY (*gallantly*). Read your economics, my dear. There's no value in an article of which the supply is unlimited. (*Mildred and Jack appear in the portière. Harry and Mabel look at them thoughtfully.*)

MABEL (*with a sigh*). They're very happy.

HARRY. Yes, confound them! Why should they be happy, and we—

MABEL. No, no, no. You mustn't say that. But I'm a little vexed with them, too, in one way.

HARRY. How's that?

MABEL. For wanting a divorce when they didn't want one.

HARRY. It's very irrational.

MABEL. Of course there are cases that are very different. Where there are profound defects of character,—

HARRY. You are too kind.

MABEL (*magnanimously*). On both sides—

HARRY. I mean you are too modest. Then, of course—

MABEL. Our divorce is necessary and reasonable, and, oh, Harry, isn't it beautiful the way our married life is coming to an end! We thought it would end in discord and railing. But it's just the opposite of that. It ends in fellowship; it ends in good deeds.

HARRY. Isn't it rather a pity that so useful a partnership should be dissolved?

MABEL (*perplexed*). Why, what more can we do? We couldn't exactly set up a matrimonial hospital, could we?

HARRY. No, I suppose not. But aren't there other good works to be done? (*Without obvious relevance.*) We haven't quarreled for a long time.

MABEL. No, not since breakfast.

HARRY. A day is a long time in matrimony. But the fact is, we haven't quarreled to-day; I mean, not since breakfast.

MABEL. Well?

HARRY. We've been helping Jack and Mildred. Now perhaps if we'd thought less of ourselves, if we'd oftener joined hands to help other people, we might have quarreled less.

MABEL (*struck*). Oh, Harry, your theories are so beautiful!

HARRY. That's because I never dull my mind with practice. (*Mildred and Jack appear in the portière. Jack is talking earnestly, his face bent toward Mildred's. Harry and Mabel watch them intently.*)

MABEL. What do you suppose he's saying, Harry?

HARRY. I don't know. He glanced at us just now. Perhaps they're talking about *our* happiness.

MABEL. That reminds me, Harry. There's one thing left that troubles me.

HARRY. What's that?

MABEL. The lies we've told.

HARRY (*relieved*). Oh, the lies!

MABEL. I shall make it a point never to forgive myself for the falsehoods you and I have told to-day.

HARRY. We ought to have thought of that before.

MABEL. Oh, no, that wouldn't have done. Then we couldn't have told them.

HARRY. I see. You are a practical woman, Mabel.

MABEL. It's a comfort, though, to think that we're both equally wicked. We're both—what is it you men say?—tarred with the same brush.

HARRY. Yes: one quite enjoys the guilt for the sake of the comradeship.

MABEL (*reprovingly*). We shall never again be fit company for decent people.

HARRY. No. We're only fit for each other.

MABEL. Harry, when they find out about our—our separation, do you think it'll make a difference?

HARRY. What difference should it make?

MABEL. They might think they'd been hoaxed into a reconciliation.

HARRY. They won't care, dear. People don't mind being swindled into happiness.

MABEL. They'll be very much shocked. I shouldn't wonder if they tried to make it up.

HARRY. That's why I'm going to Europe.

MABEL. The thought of reconciliation must be frightful to you. Are you sure Europe's far enough? Perhaps South Africa— (*They both laugh.*)

HARRY. It isn't reconciliation that's so terrible; it's the idea of being wheedled into it by other people. The making-up should be domestic like the quarrel.

MABEL. Oh, well, we aren't going to make it up.

HARRY. Of course not. When we're quarreling so genially, it would be unchristian to make it up. (*Mildred and Jack appear once more in the entrance to the corridor. This time they pause, facing each other, Mildred looking up into her husband's down-bent face, the scene picturesquely framed in the curtains and side-pieces of the doorway. Harry and Mabel watch them intently.*)

MABEL (*pensively*). It's good to see them, Harry.

HARRY (*also pensively*). It does look rather pretty.

MABEL. Do you suppose we ever made a picture as pretty as that? I'm afraid not. You're not so handsome as Jack.

HARRY. You're ever so much prettier than Mildred.

MABEL. I'm glad we brought them together, Harry. It's worth a lie or two.

HARRY (*rising with sudden resolve*). Mabel, don't you see that it wasn't lying? It was all true. (*She is startled by his tone, and rises as if in instinctive self-defense.*)

MABEL. All true!

HARRY (*impetuously*). They know what love is. They know us. Do you think we could have fooled them with a sham?

It was because it *was* real, because we did love each other, because we *do* love each other with all our hearts, that we could act so as to convince them. Mabel, there's just one end to this.

MABEL (*fascinated, but resisting*). Oh, Harry, you couldn't be so unchivalrous! To take advantage of me in a moment like this—a moment of weakness when I'm drawn to you—no, no, you couldn't be so ungenerous as that!

HARRY. Yes, I could. Am I to wait to ask you till I'm sure you'll say "No"? (*Glancing toward the corridor.*) They're turning, dear; they're coming to us in a moment! We must settle it now—now, and there's just—one—way!

MABEL (*turning on him with a look of inexpressible disappointment*). Oh!

HARRY (*holding out his arms*). Dearest! (*At this moment Mildred and Jack have fully turned, facing the audience, and are about to take their first step into the room. Mabel observes the movement.*)

MABEL (*with a sigh which becomes in turn expressive of reproach, despair, and happiness, as she flings herself upon his breast*). My Harry!

CURTAIN

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

CHARACTERS

ETIENNE VERTOT, *vinegrower in southeast France, 87 years old.*
JACQUES VERTOT, *his son, 59 years old.*
BERNARD VERTOT, *son of Jacques, 39 years old.*
PIERRE VERTOT, *son of Bernard, 19 years old.*
MARIE VALMORE, *betrothed to Pierre, 18 years old.*
JEAN, *servant to Etienne.*
DENIS, *another servant.*

The action takes place on Etienne Vertot's property on a bright May afternoon of the last century. The occasion is the marriage of Pierre Vertot and Marie Valmore, which is to take place at the house of Etienne Vertot, who is too feeble to leave his estate.

The scene on which the curtain rises is divided into three parts: the house, which forms the background, a stone-floored veranda in front of the house, and the ground-level which fills a large space in front of the veranda and flanks the veranda to the right in a broad corridor. Doors in house wall, opening on veranda at centre and on corridor at right. Around the veranda runs a low wooden railing, trebling its height at the corners. Near the right front corner of the veranda, steps lead down to the ground-level. This ground-level, which includes about two-thirds of the stage space, shows the following objects as the spectator's eye passes from right to left: a stone bench darkened with age, a sort of easel or clothes-horse on which bright-colored stuffs, now dulled with age, are spread out roughly to be aired, a linden stump, which serves as seat, a table, two chairs, and a small, delicately fashioned arbor, at the door of which is a tiny wooden bench. Hedges enclose the ground-space to right and left. Against the hedge flanking the corridor to the right is a small bronze table. An old staghound lies asleep on the veranda. The whole scene is prosper-

ous and cheerful, and except for the picturesque disorder of the stuffs all is in perfect, not to say finical, order.

Jean and Denis are adding decorations as the curtain rises. Jean places a bowl of lilies on the bronze table right and attaches three bands of scarlet silk to the neighboring hedge. The bands are upright and parallel, and the effect is stiff. Denis is winding alternate strands of white and orange round the railing of the veranda. The effect is very pretty, but when he reaches the high corner at the right and tries to carry the braid upward he is impeded by the branches of a rosebush. He tries first to include, then to exclude, the unruly shoots, and fails in both attempts.

VOICE (*from the house*). Jean! Denis! Come! (*The men drop their work, and go out right.*)

The scene is empty for some moments, then sounds are heard behind the hedge at the left front, the hedge is broken with some effort, and a lithe, small figure, in black torn clothes, with a red scarf dropping from the shoulder, leaps upon the stage. His glance moves hither and thither searchingly, and after three or four seconds he begins to glide from point to point with movements only a little less swift than glances. So unusual is his agility that when his face turns toward the audience they are surprised to find that the moustache—the only hair visible in his capped and beardless person—is white as snow. He touches things eagerly, questioningly, as if his hand savored the object like a tongue; and his face is bright or clouded according to his success or failure in finding in the object the familiarity he craves. The face changes readily from the pensive to the impish. The impish look comes out when he reaches Jean's attempts at decoration. Suddenly he removes two of the scarlet bands, drapes the third obliquely against the hedge, and brings the table with the lilies to a point where the scarlet, white, and green set off each other. The improvement is marked; he tosses the discarded bands slightingly over the hedge, and turns to inspect the unfinished work of Denis. He smiles as he perceives the

servant's problem, and with instinctive dexterity completes the decoration, giving to the included rose-shoots the effect of a charming irregularity. He draws a long breath like a man suddenly tired, seats himself pensively on the linden stump, and putting his hands under his chin, looks half frowningly, half mockingly, at the house. Then he rises, finds the bench behind the easel, stretches himself out on his back, puts out his tongue, whether at the sky or the earth it is hard to say, and in twenty seconds falls asleep. The screen of stuffs hides him completely from the other actors. The house-door right opens, and Bernard Vertot, a plump, shrewd, bourgeois-looking man, comes out, followed by Etienne Vertot in a wheeled chair propelled by the two manservants. Etienne is very old, very white, and very resolute. The grasp of his hands on the sides of his chair is firm.

BERNARD (*preceding the chair to left front near the arbor*). This way, Jean. More gently, Denis. That is right. Will you have the shawl, grandfather?

ETIENNE. No, Bernard. The air is warm—warm even for the old.

BERNARD (*to Jean and Denis, after a survey of the decorations*). You have done your work well—and quickly. I shall remember you to-night. (*The two men, following Bernard's eye, become aware of the completed decorations. They both start, then look in amazed but furtive inquiry at each other.*)

ETIENNE (*with authority*). Go in, Jean and Denis, and help the men to hang the tapestries. (*He looks around.*) I thought Pierre was here.

BERNARD. He went out an hour ago—so Jean told me.

ETIENNE (*with displeasure*). Afield? To-day?

BERNARD. Jean says Marie bade him go. She wanted to sort the stuffs in the old chests you gave her.

ETIENNE (*reflectively*). True—she is a silk-merchant's daughter.

BERNARD (*smiling a little*). She is mistress already. She told Jean to air the stuffs here in the garden. They are there now on the—what are they on? (*He walks over to the stuffs.*)

ETIENNE (*abstractedly*). On what?

BERNARD (*in a low voice*). On the old easel.

ETIENNE (*grimly*). Ah! (*Then, in a tone as low as Bernard's.*) It isn't burnt?

BERNARD. Did you want it burnt, grandfather?

ETIENNE (*not heeding his question*). I do not like old things coming out of their lairs to-day. It's an evil omen.

BERNARD (*reassuringly*). We are safe, grandfather—quite safe. Pierre loves us. He loves her.

ETIENNE. Not passionately.

BERNARD. No, but tenderly. That is better. He will marry at moonrise. Then his life is ours.

ETIENNE. I wish it were moonrise.

BERNARD. What can happen now—in four hours?

ETIENNE (*shaking his head*). Much.

BERNARD. We have not seen the other for twelve years. He lives recklessly. He may be dead.

ETIENNE. The hated do not die. (*He sees Bernard shudder a little at the words.*) Don't you hate him?

BERNARD (*hesitating*). After all, he is— (*An ireful gesture from the old man cuts short his speech.*)

ETIENNE. He is a hound.

BERNARD. Pierre has never disobeyed—not once. He will be glad to make silks in Lyons with his bride's father. If he came—the other—could he draw a young man away from his bride—*the sheets waiting?*

ETIENNE. He can do strange things. (*A clear string of musical notes is heard from without the hedge left.*)

BERNARD. What is that?

ETIENNE. Pierre?

BERNARD. That is a flute. Pierre carries no flute. There have been no flutes on the land since—the other— (*A youth of*

nineteen scrambles through the opening in the hedge now enlarged by the entrance of the trespasser. His face is handsome, frank, and wonderfully gentle. He carries in his hand a cherry-bough in full blossom.)

PIERRE. It let me through. I did not think it would. Good day, grandpapa. (*He stoops and kisses Etienne's hand.*)

ETIENNE (*severely*). That is a schoolboy's trick. You are a man to-day.

PIERRE (*winningly*). Forgive me, grandpapa. I forgot I was a man.

BERNARD. Where have you been, Pierre?

PIERRE (*seating himself on the stump*). I started for the bluffs on the river-bank. I wanted to bring Marie some columbines from up yonder where they grow among the hawks' nests. But I could not reach them; they were too far away. So I brought her a cherry-bloom from the orchard.

BERNARD. Marie would rather have the cherry-bloom.

PIERRE. I do not know. There are only sparrows' nests in cherry-trees.

ETIENNE. You are happy to-day, Pierre?

PIERRE. Surely, grandpapa. Am I not to be married to-day?

ETIENNE. And you wish nothing else?

PIERRE. Nothing. Marie is very beautiful. What more should I wish? (*There is no doubt or concealment in the eyes he raises to his great-grandfather's. If anything, they are a thought too clear.*)

BERNARD. And you will like to make silks with your father-in-law?

PIERRE (*a trifle absently*). I think I shall. (*He has been drawing from the fold of his blouse a slender object which he raises to his lips, then, remembering the presence of his relatives, lowers quietly. He shows it to the others.*) It is a flute. I found it this morning among my mother's things when I was looking for the lava comb set in onyx for Marie. She had saved it for me.

ETIENNE (*darkly*). Did you know the flute?

PIERRE (*laughing*). Yes, it is mine. It was given me a long time ago by a man—a strange man.

BERNARD (*looking at Etienne*). What man?

PIERRE. I do not know. A beggar perhaps. He kept me with him once a whole day in the woods. He had some odd, very dry, thin bread with him, and we plucked blackberries and drank the spring water. And he brought me to the gate at nightfall.

BERNARD. He gave you the flute then?

PIERRE (*smiling with pleasure*). Yes. But mother took the flute away. I did not know—not till this morning—that she had kept it for me.

ETIENNE (*angrily*). She should have burnt it.

PIERRE. No, grandpapa, it is no common flute. He made it himself—the man—from a reed growing by the Nile. Do you see that little opening? It is curved like the new moon and the horn of the bull Apis. And look at this slit—it is shaped like the beak of the ibis. He asked if some day I would go with him to Memphis and hear the jackals whimper among the tombs. And I said I would—(*he laughs*)—I was so very little. (*He muses a little.*) I *should* like to hear them.

ETIENNE. Drivel!

PIERRE (*still recollecting*). He had some blue chalk, and he drew on the white rock by the goat's crossing a picture of a Malay fishing-boat. I used to go to see it afterwards till the rains washed it quite out in October.

BERNARD. You went often?

PIERRE. Often? I do not know. I went sometimes. I wanted to see the man again. I wanted him to teach me the other half of the call.

ETIENNE. What call?

PIERRE. A gypsy call, grandpapa. He played half of it for me—like this—and when I begged for the other half, he

would not. He said it was not for the sons of vinedressers. But he said he would come back to me when I was a grown man, and he would look into my eyes and if he could see in them the least flicker of the tail of an Arab horse he would play the other half for me.

BERNARD. Are these thoughts for a man's marriage-day?

PIERRE. Are they bad thoughts, father?

BERNARD (*roughly*). Break that flute, Pierre.

PIERRE. Break it?

BERNARD. You have ears, have you not?

PIERRE. It is only a voice, father—a sweet voice—fit for a marriage-day. (*Then, seeing the hardness in Bernard's face, he turns to the old man.*) Grandpapa—

ETIENNE (*sternly*). Do sons question their fathers?

PIERRE (*without the smallest temper*). It is your will, my father. (*He breaks the flute in two, and slowly drops the pieces on the ground before the linden stump on which he is sitting.*)

BERNARD. Forget that trinket. Think of Marie. Think of your duties.

PIERRE. Yes, father. (*He bends down to pick up the fragments of the flute.*)

ETIENNE (*curtly*). Let them lie, Pierre.

PIERRE. (*lifting his eyes to his great-grandfather.*) I did not want the servant's feet to tread upon them.

ETIENNE. Let them lie. (*Pierre inclines his head respectfully. As the scene proceeds, he lets the tip of his foot approach the fragments and move them to and fro with the effect of a caress. The silence is broken by the advance of Denis through the corridor from house-door right.*)

DENIS (*at left front to Etienne*). The butler says it is four o'clock, Monsieur.

ETIENNE. True. I had forgot the nuptial wine. Take me to the cellar, Denis.

BERNARD (*anxiously*). You should not go to the cellar, grand-

father. The physician has warned you, and the vault is chilly.

ETIENNE (*grimly*). The next vault into which I go will be still chillier.

BERNARD. Stay here in the sunshine, grandfather. Let me go.

ETIENNE. A Vertot will not die of a visit to his own wine-cellar. It is my part to show my great-grandson the secret panel in the vault and the hiding-place of the key. You know about this wine, Pierre?

PIERRE. Yes, grandpapa. Only the males of the house know where the wine is kept, and it is drunk only when the son of the house takes a wife.

ETIENNE. You know the order in which it is drunk?

PIERRE (*eagerly*). I was told once. The priest drinks first (*he looks inquiringly at Etienne, who nods assent.*) Then the bride—Marie. Then the masters of the house, present or future, in their order. First you will drink, grandpapa, and then— (*A sudden tense silence falls upon the group by the constraint of which Pierre is obviously much less affected than the two others.*)

ETIENNE (*resolutely*). And then?

PIERRE. Then (*another just perceptible silence*) my father drinks, and then I—am I right, grandpapa?

ETIENNE. Quite right. Come, Denis.

BERNARD. I will go with you, grandfather.

ETIENNE (*a little impatiently*). Pierre shall go with me. There is much for you to do.

BERNARD (*respectfully*). As you will. (*All four start to leave the grounds, Denis at the back of Etienne's chair. When they reach the covered easel, Etienne signals Denis to halt. He turns to Bernard.*)

ETIENNE. These stuffs cannot stay here through the feast. Ask Marie if she wills that they be taken to her chamber or if they shall be hung elsewhere. (*Bernard bows. The party*

resumes its movement, and disappears through the door right. For some seconds the scene is vacant and noiseless. Then Denis reappears at door centre.)

DENIS. Jean! Jean!

JEAN (*appearing from door right*). Here.

DENIS. Monsieur Bernard bids you take the stand and the cloths to the chamber of Mademoiselle Valmore. (*Jean nods assent, and goes toward the easel, while Denis descends the steps from the veranda to the ground-level.*) Can you carry it alone?

JEAN (*shouldering the easel*). The weight is not much. (*He goes toward the door right, Denis following.*)

DENIS. I will open the door for you. (*Denis, looking back for a moment, is arrested by the movement of the old staghound, who has risen from his sleep on the veranda in the sunshine and followed Denis down the steps. The dog now moves toward the right. He stops by the sleeping man upon the bench, now exposed by the removal of the easel, and after an instant's hesitation licks his hand. Denis's eye is drawn to the sleeping figure. He returns down stage and stands looking at the sleeper. After an instant of amaze, recognition lights his face. He turns and beckons to Jean, who, pausing in the door which he expected Denis to open, has set down his burden and turned round. Jean obeys the signal, comes up, looks at the man on the bench, searches his mind confusedly, and suddenly grasps the truth. The two men face each other with a look in which surprise, terror, and a dim joy are strangely mingled. Then they turn again to the sleeper. Denis touches his strange footgear with a timid finger; Jean grazes with a finger equally delicate the tip of the white moustache. Both start guiltily at the sound of Bernard's voice at the door right.*)

BERNARD (*impatiently*). Jean! Denis! Why are you so slow? What are you doing? (*As he comes down stage, the*

two servants instinctively wheel round in such a fashion as to hide, if possible, the sleeper from their master's view. They do not quite succeed.)

BERNARD. Are you hiding something? What is it?

DENIS (*stammering*). Sir, it is a man, a man from outside. We—will take him away.

BERNARD. Let me see him.

DENIS (*not moving, though clearly greatly frightened*). Let us handle him, sir. He—is not fit for you to see.

BERNARD. What babble is this? Out of the way, both of you. (*Denis and Jean reluctantly give way. Bernard draws near to the bench and looks down at the sleeper. He starts, not too violently, masters himself, places his hands behind his back, and studies the sleeper with a look that moment by moment acquires vindictiveness as if his hate found nourishment in every feature. The sleeper feels the concentration of the gaze, stirs, wakes, recognizes Bernard, is quite calm in the recognition, and says impishly:*)

JACQUES. My son!

BERNARD (*in a low voice*). What do you want?

JACQUES. To look at you, Bernard—what else? (*Still reclining, he raises his head and shoulders and looks with a gay derision at Bernard.*) You are quite worth looking at, my son—a noble vinegrower. Your cheeks are round as the grape, and your lips are as ruddy as wine.

BERNARD (*same tone*). What do you want?

JACQUES. Gently, gently—I know you are impatient to be bountiful. But I must first survey my son again. Ah, what a man! So much girth at the equator, and no snow yet on the northern pole. What curves! What plateaux! To think that I, unworthy that I am, am the father of all these rotundities!

BERNARD. Will you tell me what you want?

JACQUES. Patience, patience, most obese and generous of sons. My wants will come in due time. You are rich, are you not?

Riches cling to you, I will swear, as a coin clings to butter. Bag and belly, they are fat alike. For my part, I dropped all my flesh and all my louis d'or too on the path from Samarcand to Cairo, and my purse and I are lean together.

BERNARD. Will you go away for a price? We have gold. How much do you want?

JACQUES. I want no gold. I but played, most thrifty Bernard, with that pursestring of yours which is no other in truth than your heartstring. No, no,—you have wine and gold, and tonight I will be content with wine. I will drink the nuptial wine,—I in my turn. Etienne Vertot, Jacques Vertot, Bernard Vertot, Pierre Vertot—it is a goodly order, is it not, son Bernard? It was an excellent jest of the heavens that put me between my father and you like a torn sheet of Rabelais between two pages of Holy Writ. Come! Will you help me up? No? Not a hand? (*He rises nimbly.*) Fortunately I grow limber with age. You too will grow agile, son Bernard, when it is time for you to outrun death. (*He turns round.*) Ah, who comes? (*The door right opens, and Etienne in his chair, propelled by Denis, enters. Bernard meets him halfway upstage.*)

BERNARD (*with grave solicitude*). We have borne much, grandfather. We have (*he steps aside a little and barely indicates Jacques*) more to bear.

ETIENNE (*impassively, looking at Jacques without salutation*). Forward, Denis. (*Denis guides the chair to its old place at left front. Etienne dismisses him by a gesture. Then, turning to Jacques, he speaks with low-voiced tranquillity.*) Your will?

JACQUES (*removing his cap and bowing almost to the ground*). I salute you, father. (*He studies the face of Etienne.*) My prayers are heard. The years sit lightly on you. (*The actor should discriminate between the irony of Jacques toward his father and toward Bernard; the latter is more stinging.*)

ETIENNE (*looking Jacques in the face*). My prayers are not heard; otherwise—

JACQUES. Some shark or tiger would have detained me in Asia. Ah, well, the sharks and tigers have been derelict. You have your son again.

ETIENNE. You are no son to me.

JACQUES. I have been called so by a voice like yours.

ETIENNE (*with slow emphasis*). You are to me no son—nor man either. You are a mouth to be filled. Speak quickly. What will fill it?

JACQUES. Do not be anxious, father, I assure you it is a very reasonable as well as a most respectful mouth. It asks but a sip of your old wine—the nuptial wine. Ah, there is a vintage. Three weeks ago off Malaga I dreamt of that wine in the hold of a barge stocked with figs and almonds from Cilicia. It is a wine to call back prodigals.

ETIENNE (*keenly*). Will that content you?

JACQUES (*who has seated himself on the linden stump formerly occupied by Pierre, and faces left toward Etienne*). Is that too little? Your generosity is disappointed? Shall a father's thirst to give remain unslaked? Besides the wine, I will have a look into the eyes of your great-grandson who takes a wife to-day.

ETIENNE. What have you to do with him?

JACQUES. Truly, father, I would wish him godspeed in the noble task of supplying new Vertots to a grateful France. Ah, how their country loves them! They are the fat upon her ribs. (*His eye is caught by an object on the ground in front of him.*)

ETIENNE. Jacques Vertot—

JACQUES (*picking up one fragment of the flute from the ground and inspecting it with interest*). You are pleased to recollect my name?

ETIENNE. Jacques Vertot, I am old—

JACQUES (*searching the ground for the other piece of flute*).

I too, father. I look now at every hole in the ground that I pass. It makes a face at me and says "By-and-by," and I—I make a face back at it, and say "Not yet." But you, father—you are the living proof to all eyes that death is polite. It will not hurry the Vertots.

ETIENNE. It neither hurries nor spares. Listen to me. My lease of life is short. You would respect my grave perhaps. Respect its edge. What is this lad—what is this day—to you? They are all I have. Leave them to me, I—I—

JACQUES (*who has discovered the other fragment*). Speak, father.

ETIENNE (*putting force on himself*). I—(*He gets no further.*)

JACQUES (*eying Etienne curiously*). What would you say?

ETIENNE (*with another great effort*). I—entreat. (*The tone is just audible.*)

JACQUES (*almost moved*). No, no, most gallant of fathers, you shall not lower yourself to entreat your devil-may-care blackguard of a son. Besides, this I may not grant, though I were asked by the Archangel Michael in person and all the saints and patriarchs to boot. That boy I must see.

ETIENNE (*after a pause*). We have some gold. It has been earned with pain—but let that pass. We have a little gold. Will you take half our fortune and be gone?

JACQUES (*putting the broken edges of the flute together*). No, I will not take the half of your fortune; I am too dutiful a son. And I will not be gone; I am too excellent a grandfather.

ETIENNE. As excellent a grandfather as you have been a loyal son and a kind father, Jacques Vertot. (*Sharply.*) What do you want with this boy?

JACQUES. Nothing, probably. I shall look into his eyes, and if I see there nothing but a kneading-trough and a clothes-press,—do I want him? (*His gesture is contemptuous.*)

ETIENNE. He is not like you.

JACQUES. Like whom, then? Like Bernard? Like my rosy and globular son? Look at him, father. His belly is round like a puncheon and his chin is a saucer to itself. No, my grandson is not like that. Nature does not repeat her masterpieces.

ETIENNE (*suddenly changing the apparent subject*). How did you get in here?

JACQUES (*who is busy fastening the fragments of the flute together by some secret cunning of his own*). The fox's way. I came through the hedge. (*He points left.*)

ETIENNE (*after a pause, significantly*). I am a magistrate.

JACQUES. And I a vagrant. We have a bond, my father.

ETIENNE. I could put you under lock and key.

JACQUES. True. But it would not be Jacques alone that would go to prison. It would be a Vertot. (*They look at each other.*) What do you fear? You have had him all his life. Do you think I can undo in ten minutes the work of nineteen years?

BERNARD. The devil aids you.

JACQUES (*smiling again*). The devil is obliging, my good son, but I should not think of asking him to work miracles for a servitor so humble as myself. One must not strain a friend's good-nature too far.

ETIENNE. Listen to me, Jacques Vertot. I speak for the last time. I swear to you if God be just and heeds the prayers of an old man who has tried to serve him, you shall not see this boy.

JACQUES. God, my dear father, is not too just, and like other great folk, he is cloyed with supplications. (*Suddenly turning angry.*) What possesses you? By my soul, if this boy be what your quaverings and cowerings teach me to believe he is, let priest and notary come betimes. Take heed to yourselves, good father, gracious son. If I be chafed, I may grow dangerous. (*He throws himself in a reclining posture on the stump, adjusting himself with great dexterity to its*

narrow compass, and, looking up into the sky, applies his lips soundlessly to the flute. The door centre opens, and Pierre crosses the veranda and comes halfway down the steps.)

PIERRE. The Abbé's carriage has been seen, grandpapa, at the top of the Neuchâtel hill.

ETIENNE (*agitated, but controlling himself*). Good. Go. Pierre, inform Marie and her parents, and go yourself to the gate to meet the Abbé and make him welcome to our house. Tell him that when he has refreshed himself, your father and I will make haste to greet him.

PIERRE. Yes, grandpapa. (*He is turning round to go, when Jacques, who has been lying on his back without a glance at Pierre or the slightest visible interest in the conversation, suddenly whips over on his left side, and darts at Pierre a curious glance made up in nearly equal parts of challenge and insouciance. Pierre starts.*)

ETIENNE (*firmly, and with studied gentleness*). Go, Pierre.

PIERRE (*instantly tractable*). Yes, grandpapa. (*With a last glance at Jacques, he retires toward door centre. His hand is on the doorknob when he is detained by a voice that is equally marked by authority and mildness.*)

JACQUES. Pierre Vertot, come here. (*Pierre stops, hesitating.*)

ETIENNE (*putting all his authority into his voice, but with entire calm*). You heard me, I think, great-grandson.

PIERRE. I am going, sir. (*Again he turns. Jacques puts the flute to his lips and plays several bars of a gay, exciting, vagrant call. He stops abruptly in the middle.*)

PIERRE (*forgetting everything but the call and running down the veranda steps to Jacques*). Play the rest of it!

JACQUES. Not yet. (*He smiles, half teasingly, half winningly, at Pierre. Etienne, whose face has grown white, is about to speak, when one of Bernard's hands is laid upon his shoulder while the other points to Pierre's uplifted face. There is something so remote in the raptness of Pierre's expression that even the angry grandfather perceives the hope-*

lessness of pressing the conflict to an issue then and there. The two men look fixedly at Pierre and Jacques during the dialogue that follows.)

JACQUES (*to Pierre*). Fetch a chair. (*Pierre fetches a chair from left.*) Sit down. (*Pierre sits down left of Jacques.*) Look into my eyes. Look, I say. Not that way. You might look at a mullein-leaf or a plover's egg so. Look! That is better. Do you see anything?

PIERRE (*perplexed*). I do not understand.

JACQUES (*a little impatiently*). Do you see perhaps pyramids and caravans and simoons and mirages?

PIERRE (*suddenly smiling*). I think I see blackberry vines and a blue drawing on a white rock.

JACQUES. You have a memory? That is not so bad.

PIERRE. Who are you?

JACQUES. I? Ask your excellent father. Who am I, Bernard Vertot? Your son is curious.

BERNARD (*looking on the ground after a rather long irresolute pause*). He is a beggar.

PIERRE (*looking at Jacques*). Are you?

JACQUES. He doubts still,—doubts his estimable father. Do you speak, Etienne Vertot. Tell this young man who I am.

ETIENNE (*looking at Pierre*). Does your father lie, Pierre?

JACQUES. They agree, you see, the truth-telling Vertots. They are right. I am a beggar. Will you give me food and shelter for to-night?

PIERRE. Gladly, if my father and my great-grandsire will.

JACQUES. You are married to-night?

PIERRE. Yes.

JACQUES. Who is the woman?

PIERRE. She is the daughter of a silk-merchant in Lyons.

JACQUES. Caterpillars!

PIERRE. Sir?

JACQUES. Spinners all. Worms, worms—on two legs or twenty.

PIERRE (*with boyish dignity*). She is my bride, stranger.

JACQUES. Ay, ay. (*He pauses a second.*) You love her? She is pleasant to the eye?

PIERRE. She is beautiful.

JACQUES. Her beauty will last five or six years, and *she* will last— (*He shrugs his shoulders.*) You are content, then?

PIERRE. Surely.

JACQUES (*to himself*). Yet he remembered the call. (*His eye strays to the flute in his hand. He turns with sudden sharpness to Pierre.*) Who broke that flute?

PIERRE (*hesitating slightly*). It was I.

JACQUES. You?

PIERRE. I did not break it willingly. My father bade me.

JACQUES. He breaks flutes at his father's bidding! *He breaks flutes!* (*To Etienne and Bernard.*) Take him, Messieurs. He is yours. (*To Pierre.*) I have done with you. Go to your broths and quilts. Huckster! Cradle-rocker! Flute-breaker!

PIERRE. In Provence we obey our fathers,—though we love flutes.

JACQUES. In Provence? Listen to me. These feet of mine have known many roads. Do you see the brown on this cheek? It is the work of many suns, suns of Tangier and Tripoli and Sahara, of Damascus and Ceylon and Singapore. I have seen Sirius in I know not how many waters, in Baikal and Aral and the Euxine, in Nile and Como and the Ganges. This hand has touched strange hands and done strange things; it has struck and it has bled: but it never broke a flute; it never gave away a flute but once, and then to a flute-breaker.

PIERRE (*who has been listening intently*). Go on.

JACQUES (*struck*). On?

PIERRE. I do not mind the chiding. Tell me all.

JACQUES (*pointing toward the horizon*). Do you see the blue hills?

PIERRE (*eagerly*). Yes.

JACQUES. Have you ever wished to go there?

PIERRE. Often.

JACQUES. You have never gone?

PIERRE. Never. (*He adds in reply to the question in Jacques's face.*) There was my work, my play,—(*with a shy glance at Bernard*) my father.

JACQUES. Listen to me, Pierre Vertot. (*His voice is subdued and solemn.*) You will never get to the blue hills unless you go to-day, and (*long pause*)—if you go to-day (*second long pause*)—you will not marry.

(*Etienne, who has been listening attentively, speaks to Bernard in an inaudible voice. This dumb-show conversation continues during the next two or three speeches.*)

PIERRE. Not marry?

JACQUES. It is no place for brides. The valleys are troughs—feeding-troughs, and the meadows trenchers. They are fit for women. The hills will not dandle you.

PIERRE. But to-day? (*Bernard, apparently at Etienne's bidding, goes out by veranda steps and door centre.*)

JACQUES (*not heeding him*). You shall have no ease with me. I offer you hard bread and hard bedding, and the breasts of the woman that shall fall to your lot in my company will be hard too. I will give you poverty and hardship and the sun when your soul cries out for coolness, and the frost when your body pines for warmth. And for all this you shall have nothing but a little freedom and a little song and a laugh at the sleek sides of the fat burgher and a look in the stars at night sometimes that they never show to the dwellers under rooftrees. It is little enough. Does it tempt you?

(*Pierre watches the speaker as if spellbound. Meanwhile the door centre opens and Bernard appears, leading Marie Valmore. Bernard leads her to the foot of the veranda steps. Then he touches Pierre on the shoulder.*)

BERNARD. Your betrothed, my son. (*Pierre steps back toward Marie, still looking at Jacques, and absently, yet with an*

affectionate trustfulness all the more marked for its combination with the absence, puts his hand within her arm. Marie is very pretty with small, strikingly regular features, and a look of housewifely skill; beyond this, there are no signs of mind. She is in her wedding-gown, but without either veil or jewels.)

MARIE (*without pettishness*). My dress, Pierre. (*With an amusingly unromantic dexterity, but with perfect good-temper, she removes Pierre's arm from its place and puts it round her waist in such a fashion that its pressure is no longer harmful. Pierre, whose eyes have never left Jacques, is smilingly but vaguely conscious of the movement. Marie looks at Jacques, whose cap sweeps the ground in a gesture of ironic deference. Marie's eyes rest with disfavor on the earthstains on Jacques's shoes and small clothes.*)

JACQUES. The baptism of the road, Mademoiselle. The road and I are lovers, and it clings to me even when I run away.

MARIE. Come into the house with me, Pierre.

PIERRE. Soon, dearest, soon.

MARIE. Who is this man?

PIERRE. He is—I do not quite know what he is, Marie. He says he is a beggar.

MARIE. If he is a beggar, give him bread and olives and bid him be gone upon his way.

PIERRE (*slightly laughing*). It will take more than bread and olives to make this man go, I think.

MARIE (*primly*). Then he is a very greedy beggar.

JACQUES (*who, from the linden-stump, surveys Marie with a sort of contemptuous approval*). The alms, I ask, pretty lady, is a soul.

MARIE (*with umbrage*). That is like the devil.

JACQUES (*whimsically*). Or like God.

MARIE. He says evil things, Pierre. Come with me.

PIERRE (*with what might be described as imploring refusal*). Dearest! (*Marie, in pique, releases herself. Pierre timidly,*

and as by way of trial, extends the arm once more, but she evades the clasp. During this dumb-show Etienne and Bernard have been speaking in low tones.)

ETIENNE. She cannot move him.

BERNARD. There is always the other means.

ETIENNE. You sent for the man?

BERNARD. He will be there. (*Slight pause. Then Etienne addresses Jacques, avoiding the use of his name.*)

ETIENNE. Wayfarer—

JACQUES (*with malice, turning toward Etienne*). I listen, proprietor.

ETIENNE. You should be told that this is my great-grandson's wedding-day.

JACQUES. I know. How should I not know? I have assisted in the decorations. (*He glances toward the railing.*)

ETIENNE. If you will be pleased to hear me—

JACQUES (*with suavity*). I but interrupt the pleasure to prolong it.

ETIENNE. On such a day you will understand that my great-grandson has but small time for—

JACQUES. Wayfarers? What then? Do I hold him? Let him go to his bit of Eve's flesh. It is toothsome. (*He glances at Marie.*)

ETIENNE (*austerely*). My great-grandson is under an influence which—which your departure will remove.

JACQUES (*putting himself at ease on the stump*). Ay, if I depart.

ETIENNE (*sinisterly*). Will you go?

JACQUES. I will go if the young fellow bids me. If he tires of me, let him speak. (*There is a pause.*)

BERNARD (*turning to Pierre*). Pierre, bid him go.

PIERRE (*advancing two steps right toward Bernard*). My father!

BERNARD. He will go at your bidding. Bid him go.

PIERRE (*very humbly*). We cannot turn the beggar unfed

from our house to-day, my father. When the house is glad, it should be kind.

BERNARD. It is your father who speaks to you.

PIERRE (*very gently*). The best of fathers. He will not ask me to do this.

ETIENNE (*severely*). Pierre!

PIERRE. Sir?

ETIENNE. The sons of the Vertots obey their fathers.

JACQUES (*looking at Etienne*). They are blest in their sons.

ETIENNE. Speak, Pierre. (*Pierre turns as if to obey, advances a step toward Jacques, who watches him with the eyes of a lynx, pauses, turns again, makes a gesture of the deepest distress and self-abasement before his father and great-grandfather, and retires to the veranda steps. He sits down on the lowest step, passes his left hand across his face, and with the other searches for Marie's. She does not refuse her hand.*)

JACQUES (*adjusting himself comfortably on the stump.*) The sons of the Vertots! Their fathers know them no more.

ETIENNE (*to Jacques*). Will you go?

JACQUES. Go? When the sunshine in this garden is so warm. The sunshine, good sir, is the beggar's patrimony. Look to your gear; I can doze in comfort. The stump, to be sure, is a trifle narrow, but I am like a snail or a housedog—I can make myself a girdle for myself. (*He curls himself up in a drowsy circle on the stump. From this time the light gradually fades.*)

ETIENNE. Arouse yourself. Will you go peaceably, or will you force us to take other measures?

JACQUES (*lazily*). Other measures? Will you set the dog on me? Come hither, Saladin. (*The dog gets up, goes to Jacques, and licks his cheek. Pierre watches the action intently.*) I have a spell for dogs—for servants, too, mayhap, though I grant your menials here are lusty fellows.

ETIENNE. There are gendarmes.

JACQUES (*sitting up*). Gendarmes? Ah, the resourcefulness

of the French bourgeois! When he has a delicate situation, he sends for the gendarmes. He cuts his fingernails with a broad-axe. (*Pierre has risen to his feet.*)

BERNARD (*to Jacques*). If you will go peaceably, Denis will guide you to the landing where the river-barge stops at half-past-five. He will see you on the boat and return. If you will not go with Denis, a gendarme is in waiting who will take you to the prison in Greville. Am I clear?

JACQUES (*facing Etienne and Bernard after an electrical side-glance at Pierre.*) Blunderers!

ETIENNE. What is your choice?

JACQUES (*provokingly*). A doze in the sun. (*He resumes his reclining posture and fondles the dog. Pierre has risen. Marie puts a coaxing hand upon his shoulder and points to the door centre.*)

MARIE. Come, Pierre. (*Pierre kisses her hand abstractedly, and says nothing. Marie intimates rather than actually accomplishes a toss of the head, and, with an ill-temper which is a mere ripple in her self-complacency, returns by herself to the house. Pierre approaches Bernard.*)

PIERRE. Father, who is this man? You would not send for a gendarme to turn out a common vagabond. Who is he?

BERNARD (*hesitating*). He is—he is—

JACQUES. You embarrass your good father, young man. I will tell you who I am. I am a fishbone whom the Vertots have swallowed and who will choke them to death if he be not instantly removed. They are purple in the face coughing.

PIERRE (*to Jacques*). I do not understand. (*To Bernard.*) Father, you cannot send for the gendarmes. The man is old, father. He is poor. It is my wedding-day. We must not give an old man cause to think of us with anger on the day when we ask God to be kind to our house. I have many reasons to love you, father. Give me one more. Be kind to this old man.

BERNARD. We have reasons for what we do, Pierre—reasons that I may not tell you. Content yourself.

PIERRE (*approaching Etienne's chair after a moment of irresolution, and dropping to the ground on one knee*). Great-grandfather!

ETIENNE. Speak.

PIERRE. I have sometimes thought that you loved to make me happy. You have done so much for me that I have asked you for little—except childish things like toys and holidays. Grant me one thing. Let this man stay with us for to-night. Let him have his bit of bread and his sip of wine, and let him pray with the rest of us, if he so wills, for bright years for me and for Marie and for our children. Do this, great-grandfather, that I may never cease to love you the more for this when I think of this day.

ETIENNE (*with hardness*). Your father is right. Have you been dutiful? When a father's commands are disobeyed, a son's prayers should not be heeded. (*Pierre listens with bowed head, stands for a moment thoughtful, then turns toward Jacques right.*)

PIERRE (*with a delicate respect*). Sir, my great-grandfather and my father are wise and good, and you have heard their will. I am the youngest of the house. My will cannot open these doors. If it could, you should be welcome. If it ever can, you shall be welcome then. (*He offers his hand to Jacques.*)

JACQUES (*taking the hand*). When I come again, you shall hear—

PIERRE. What?

JACQUES (*smiling*). The rest of the call. (*He rises, and turns to Etienne and Bernard.*) I go unforced, gentlemen, since there is a sprig of your stock that would grieve to see a gendarme's hand upon an old man's shoulder. But look to yourselves. I came here but to jest and tease. If I had caught your birdling in my net, I would have held him only long

enough to laugh at you and loose him. You have done after your kind, and I say to you now,—*fear me.* (*He turns toward the opening in the hedge. Pierre follows him two or three steps. Jacques turns, looks at Pierre, and lays his hand deliberately upon his shoulder.*)

JACQUES (*with sudden unexpected tenderness*). Will you go with me? (*Pierre's look, for a moment, seems eagerly receptive, then, releasing himself with the utmost gentleness, he retreats a step or two, and speaks in a tone in which friendliness is touched with delicate reproach.*)

PIERRE. It is my wedding-day.

JACQES (*instantly resuming his impishness*). Adieu,—bridegroom. (*He escapes through the opening.*)

BERNARD (*after a pause*). We should all go in. Come, Pierre.

PIERRE. Yes, father. (*There is a rustle in the hedge, and the face of Jacques suddenly reappears in the opening.*)

JACQUES (*with a quick glance at Etienne and Bernard*). Goodnight, grandson. (*He disappears. A silence. Pierre, stupefied, turns to the others.*)

PIERRE. It is true?

ETIENNE (*grimly*). His name is Jacques Vertot.

PIERRE. He isn't dead?

BERNARD (*bitterly*). He breathes—if that is what you mean. (*A silence.*)

ETIENNE. You shall hear more of this some day, Pierre. The man has less right in this house than a thief. There is no time for speech. Forget him. Think only that you are to be married.

PIERRE (*dazedly, hand at forehead*). Married? To-night?

ETIENNE (*sternly*). When else? Go to your bride. Come, Bernard. (*Bernard wheels the chair to door right, while Pierre mounts the veranda steps toward the other door. But with his hand on the knob, he pauses, looks around, finds himself alone, and comes back to the veranda rail. He remains nearly motionless for a time that represents about five*

minutes of real life. Marie, fully gowned, a delicate vision in the increasing twilight, appears at door centre.)

MARIE (*touching his arm*). They want you, Pierre.

PIERRE. Dearest! (*He makes a movement as if to take her in his arms.*)

MARIE. My gown, Pierre! My gown!

PIERRE (*apologetically*). I forgot. There is so much gown. Sit down, Marie.

MARIE. We ought to go, Pierre.

PIERRE. No, no, sit down a minute with me. (*He leads her half by force to a seat on the veranda, and kneels on a footstool at her feet. During the ensuing dialogue Pierre's mood is fitfully and feverishly gay until it is damped by the progress of the conversation.*) Marie!

MARIE. Well?

PIERRE (*coaxing and eager*). Come and have a run with me on the greensward in the twilight.

MARIE (*shocked*). Certainly not. I should spoil my slippers.

PIERRE (*whisperingly*). Take off the slippers.

MARIE. No, Pierre. I should take cold in the dew.

PIERRE. One doesn't take cold on one's wedding-night.

MARIE. Why doesn't one?

PIERRE. Because—because—somebody one loves kisses off the dewdrops—a kiss for every drop.

MARIE (*rationally*). That would take too much time.

PIERRE. I will kiss the foot anyhow. (*He brings his lips close to the satin bow.*)

MARIE (*drawing back the least bit*). On the stocking, please.

PIERRE. On the stocking, yes. It is a dear foot, and I kiss it gladly. (*With a shade of pensiveness.*) But I would have kissed it a dozen times if it had raced with me over the greensward in the dusk.

MARIE. You are wild to-night, Pierre.

PIERRE (*still on his knees, looking downstage toward the hori-*

zon). It is so dark there is no blue left on the hills, Marie!

MARIE. Yes?

PIERRE. Will you go with me to the blue hills to-morrow morning?

MARIE. To-morrow morning?

PIERRE. *He* said if I married I should never go to the blue hills.

MARIE. What should we do there?

PIERRE (*a little puzzled*). I think we should look into the sky a little and then down into the plains and then—then—we should look into each other's eyes.

MARIE. That would not do at all. We are to go to-morrow to my aunt near Carcassonne. She is a very good woman, and she has many vineyards that look directly south and are very fruitful.

PIERRE. But—(*he stops and looks again toward the horizon.*) I shall never go. There will always be an aunt near Carcassonne.

MARIE. Not always. She is seventy-five years old.

PIERRE (*looking at Marie*). Are there people as old as that?

MARIE. Of course. That is why we go first to her. Later we shall visit my aunt near Toulouse. Her vineyards look south-southwest, and she is only sixty-two years old. She may live many years yet.

PIERRE. Do aunts live so long, Marie?

MARIE. Yes, aunts are longlived. It is inconvenient sometimes, but I do not blame them.

PIERRE. We shall be happy without aunts, Marie.

MARIE. When God takes them, yes.

PIERRE (*sitting on the footstool*). Will you love me, Marie, very much?

MARIE. Certainly I shall love you. All good wives love their husbands.

PIERRE. I wish you would love me a little more than the other good wives love their husbands.

MARIE. Why?

PIERRE. Because I should love you so much more for the little more than for all the rest of it.

MARIE. That is silly, Pierre. Enough is enough.

PIERRE (*looking at her wistfully*). Not on one's wedding-day.

MARIE (*decisively*). On one's wedding-day one should begin to be sensible. We are grown people now, and we shall have children very soon.

PIERRE. Ah, you will like that, Marie.

MARIE. I shall like it, of course. Your father and my father will do a great deal more for us after we have had a child or two. Besides, they are pleasant things anyhow. (*Pierre rises, and goes to the veranda rail. He looks out broodingly.*)

PIERRE. (*suddenly turning his face toward Marie*). Marie, if that strange man came to our house, would you let him stay?

MARIE. That man? Surely not. He is a vagabond.

(*Pierre turns his face again toward the horizon. Suddenly the full clear joyous notes of a wedding-march are heard from the interior of the house. Marie rises hastily.*)

MARIE. They are waiting for us. Come, Pierre. (*Pierre starts to give Marie his hand, when another sound from beyond the lower stage left makes a second and more piercing cleavage of the silence. It is the first half of the flute-call played by Jacques. Pierre faces round, approaches the veranda rail, and listens with every nerve on edge. The wedding march continues. The first half of the call is completed; the second, a wilder, shriller, more alluring, reckless, and defiant melody, begins. Pierre starts up, is halfway down the veranda steps, thinks of Marie, turns, is instantly at her side. He is about to clasp her impetuously in his arms when she puts up her hands in an instinctive effort to protect her gown. A rueful, half-humorous smile just lightens the tragic purpose in his face as he stoops, almost without interruption of his gesture, to print upon her hands the passionate kiss he had meant for her lips. Almost instantly he is gone; the rus-*

tle of the twigs and leafage in the hedge-opening informs the girl of his departure The sound of the wedding-march rises ever richer and more joyous; the flute puts more and more of the heart of the road into its jubilant and mocking notes; her hand on the veranda-rail, looking after Pierre, the bride stands, white and lonely, in the dusk.)

CURTAIN

THE REFERENCE

CHARACTERS

MRS. EDGECOMBE
PHILIP SOMERS
OLIVIA CHILLINGWORTH

The reception-room in Mrs. Edgecombe's apartment in New York has an entrance at back centre, a door at the right, and windows in the left-hand wall overlooking the unseen street. The room is furnished with subdued elegance: piano at right, sofa at left front, easy-chairs at obvious points. Mrs. Edgecombe, at telephone near piano, is a handsome woman of thirty. There are signs in her face of a wilful and imperious temper checked by social cynicism and a sense of humor. She holds the receiver poised in her hand as if debating a suggestion, then speaks in a controlled voice.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Ask him to come up. (*She replaces the receiver, then, after an instant's quiescence, paces the floor rapidly. She is checked by the thought that the motion may show itself in heightened color, and turns to a mirror on the right. She opens a drawer, hesitates, then closes it abruptly, as if refusing to make herself attractive to the visitor. She looks once more, and with a certain irony, at her image in the glass. The bell rings. She leaves the mirror hastily. Philip Somers enters and bows with deference, almost humility, to Mrs. Edgecombe. He is a man of thirty-three, with a frank expression, re-enforced by blue eyes and yellow hair, and with a figure which justifies his height. His manner varies between habitual ease and the diffidence natural to his peculiar errand.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*civilly, but formally*). How do you do?

PHILIP SOMERS. It is very good of you to see me.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Not at all. I see anyone—on business.

PHILIP SOMERS. It is something to be even anyone to you. I feared I was nobody.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*smiling, but still distant*). And if you were, so much the more reason for letting you see me.

PHILIP SOMERS (*a little chilled*). Ah, you see me because I am nobody.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Something like that. I see you because our past—the past—is nothing to me.

PHILIP SOMERS. Do you mean that?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Why not? I prove it by seeing you.

PHILIP SOMERS. May I sit down?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. By all means. I forget my duties. It is long since you have been my guest. (*She motions him to a chair in the centre of the room and seats herself on the sofa.*)

PHILIP SOMERS (*after a long look*). You are looking very well.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Divorce is becoming. I think it agrees with you, too. Your face is fuller than it was.

PHILIP SOMERS (*absently*). I have gained ten pounds.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. And I three. Our separation is justified.

PHILIP SOMERS. You are cruel to jest about it.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. You are quite mistaken, Philip. I am simply too kind to be serious.

PHILIP SOMERS. You can call me Philip, then?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*coolly*). I call you Philip, because no "misters" could put us farther apart than we now are. What do sounds matter to us?

PHILIP SOMERS. It meant a good deal to me the first time you called me Philip.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. There are others to call you Philip now, at least if gossip is correct.

PHILIP SOMERS. Gossip?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Three or four people have mentioned your engagement to Miss Chillingworth.

PHILIP SOMERS. I am not engaged to Miss Chillingworth—not yet. Rumor has got ahead of the facts.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*politely*). I hope the facts will overtake the rumor.

PHILIP SOMERS (*pointedly*). They may, if you will help.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with unfeigned surprise*). If I will help?

PHILIP SOMERS (*very frankly*). Katherine, Miss Chillingworth wants to see you.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. For what?

PHILIP SOMERS. She wants to ask you about me.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Do you expect me to believe that?

PHILIP SOMERS. Miss Chillingworth is a girl of strong common sense. She believes in reason even in love. She says she would not engage a lawyer or a doctor without knowing something about him from his clients or patients. She believes a husband should be chosen in the same way.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*looking hard at Philip*). She is certainly original.

PHILIP SOMERS (*defensively*). She is sincere.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*rather drily*). That's one way of being original.

PHILIP SOMERS (*protestingly*). You are bitter.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I'm not bitter, Philip. I'm informed. (*A pause.*) So a husband is to furnish references like a cook.

PHILIP SOMERS (*pained*). Not like a cook!

MRS. EDGECOMBE. And I, being the only person who has made a trial of the present applicant, am to testify to his character?

PHILIP SOMERS (*uncomfortably*). Put it that way if you like.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Hasn't it occurred to this young lady that she might get what she wants by simpler means? The files of the *New York Times,* for instance?

PHILIP SOMERS (*writhing*). Katherine!

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*considerately*). I don't want to hurt you, Philip, and I forgot that you are in love, or think you are, with this extraordinary young woman. But don't you see that she doesn't love you?

PHILIP SOMERS. Why not?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Love doesn't investigate. Love is sure,—that's what makes it love. Why doesn't she test your heart with a stethoscope?

PHILIP SOMERS (*in a low voice*). If we had investigated, Katherine—

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*also in a low voice, with revulsion*). Ah, we!

PHILIP SOMERS (*mildly firm*). I think love needs to be mixed with common sense.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*rising impatiently and pacing the floor*). Oh, there's no foolishness like sense where sense is out of place. Only two things can make marriage feasible, a great passion or a rooted habit. The passion dies anyhow, and the question is simply whether it lasts long enough for the habit to take root.

PHILIP SOMERS. It's a very pretty formula, but was that our case?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*stopping in her walk, with an almost friendly glance at Philip, and saying with a laugh which is for the first time pleasant*). No. You are quite right, Philip. It wasn't.

PHILIP SOMERS (*rising after an anxious pause*). You won't see her, then?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. See her? I wouldn't miss the chance! I'd *pay* to see her. (*A pause.*) But why did she send you, Philip? I should have expected a girl of that type to come herself.

PHILIP SOMERS (*with some embarrassment*). She is here. She is waiting in the car outside.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Ah, she is here already? You are very confident, both of you. Don't you think that in a case so delicate a little doubt would have been—becoming?

PHILIP SOMERS (*penitently*). I forgot the delicacies. (*Almost boyishly*). You see I had all I could do to get up my courage.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. But why didn't she come by herself? I don't understand why *you're* here.

PHILIP SOMERS. I wanted to see you first.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Why?

PHILIP SOMERS. I wanted to ask you not to spare me.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*smiling*). Was that so probable?

PHILIP SOMERS. I thought you might feel bound in honor not to spoil my chances with another woman. You were always generous. But I don't want that—I want the truth for her sake.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. *You* are very generous. (*She adds, with a certain discontent, as she turns away.*) You always were.

PHILIP SOMERS (*simply*). I've tried to be.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Oh, not merely tried, you've succeeded. Your success has been—

PHILIP SOMERS. What?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*eying him reflectively*). I was going to say —disastrous. But let that pass. So you've come to ask me to save this girl from you?

PHILIP SOMERS (*with a rather charming meekness*). If I am a danger, yes.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*faintly satirical*). Do you think you're dangerous?

PHILIP SOMERS. I was—to you. I shouldn't like to make the second woman unhappy.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with a keen glance*). And you think you love this girl?

PHILIP SOMERS. I know I do.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. You are quite wrong, Philip. You love nothing but your high ideal of conduct, and you are ready to jilt this girl this minute for the sake of that ideal.

PHILIP SOMERS. Will you tell Olivia exactly what you think of me? Will you tell her just that if that is what you think?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I will be quite frank with her. Will you ask her to come up?

PHILIP SOMERS. You are very good. (*He goes out back. Mrs. Edgecombe steps to the window and looks out. She turns, crosses the room, seats herself in a chair at the right, and begins to cut the leaves of a magazine. The bell rings and Olivia Chillingworth is shown in. She is twenty years old, flushed, impetuous, fearless. She searches Mrs. Edgecombe's face with a swift, deciding glance, and crosses the room unhesitatingly with both hands outstretched.*)

OLIVIA. Yes, you are the woman I wanted.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*smiling*). I am glad to be satisfactory.

OLIVIA. Oh, don't laugh at me. I'm absurd, heaven knows, but don't laugh at me. I knew that I could tell by the first look at you whether I had done very wrong or very right to come.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I shall be very glad to be of use. Won't you sit down?

OLIVIA. May I stand up or walk about? I hate chairs.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Do quite as you like.

OLIVIA (*pacing the floor*). You see I don't want to throw away my life for a passion. I think girls are silly about passions. A life is much bigger than a passion, don't you think so?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Is it a passion?

OLIVIA (*stopping short with a resolute movement*). I don't know. He's very nice and I'm very fond of him. I'd like to marry him, yes, I would awfully. Is that being in love?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Nobody can tell but you.

OLIVIA (*impatiently*). How can I tell? I don't know how much other people feel. I don't want to die for him.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Do you want to marry him?

OLIVIA (*positively, but without effusion*). Yes. Only there's you.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I?

OLIVIA. How could a man like him make a woman like you miserable? That's what I want explained. That's why it's so good (*she comes straight to Mrs. Edgecombe and looks steadily in her face*) that you are you. (*A pause. She kneels at the other woman's feet.*) Shall I marry him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. My dearest child!

OLIVIA (*insistently*). Shall I marry him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*after a pause*). That I cannot tell you. But I can tell you our story—his and mine.

OLIVIA (*self-reproachfully*). Will it hurt you? I'm a brute.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. No, I think it will be a relief. Only—don't walk about. (*Another pause.*) I did not marry Philip Somers for love. Indeed at that time I was thinking of another person.

OLIVIA (*with a certain repressed ardor*). Yes!

MRS. EDGECOMBE. When we were first married, I was shrinking, reluctant. He guessed the reason.

OLIVIA. And then?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. After that he never pressed me. He was consideration itself.

OLIVIA (*rising almost proudly*). That was like him. Oh, I forgot. (*She resumes her position.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with a half-humorous sigh*). It was certainly very like him. He is always very like himself.

OLIVIA. Go on.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. The next thing was a summer in the country where we met this other man by accident. Philip divined the truth. He rather threw us together.

OLIVIA (*with a deep, indrawn breath*). Ah, yes.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I played chess and tennis with this man for four weeks, and then—

OLIVIA (*her eyes shining*). I know. You went to Philip, and he agreed to the divorce.

MRS. EDGCOMBE. Quite the contrary. For the first two of the four weeks this man threw a spell upon me. After that —I was unspeakably bored.

OLIVIA. Ah! (*She broods over this, and looks wonderingly at Mrs. Edgecombe.*) That would have sent me straight to Philip.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I was ready to love Philip. But (*with a gesture of impatience*) he could see nothing.

OLIVIA (*with sudden passionate sympathy*). Couldn't you tell him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. He couldn't listen. He was all wrapped up in his ideas of delicacy. He thought I had sacrificed myself for him, and he wanted to pay me for it.

OLIVIA (*reasoningly*). Well, that wasn't so bad, you know.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. No, it was altogether too good. He walked on tiptoe all round me. You know how nervous it makes you to have anyone always walking on tiptoe.

OLIVIA (*uncertainly*). Yes.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. If I made a joke or suggested a little party of pleasure, he looked at me with a look that said, "Ah, you poor brave dear!" Oh, you can't realize it. Imagine being treated like an invalid when you're perfectly well.

OLIVIA. And—and—how long did that last?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. About a year and a half. Then I asked for my divorce.

OLIVIA. And he?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. He jumped at the chance—the chance to sacrifice himself. When he said to me in that forbearing tone of his, "Certainly, my dear," I—I could have struck him.

OLIVIA (*still at Mrs. Edgecombe's feet, but turning with a decided movement that enables her to search the older woman's face*). You wanted to strike him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with a slight smile*). That seems brutal to you?

OLIVIA. Brutal? No, indeed. But— (*She closes her lips firmly.*) I thought of something. I will tell you—but not now—later. Is there more?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. That's quite all.

OLIVIA (*rising*). May I walk now?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with a smile*). Certainly.

OLIVIA (*stopping short in her walk, and facing Mrs. Edgecombe*). Shall I marry him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. My dear!

OLIVIA (*insistently*). You know the worst of him. Shall I marry him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Philip Somers is everything that is generous.

OLIVIA (*almost impatiently*). I know that. Is he endurable? That's the question.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*slowly*). For the woman who questions—perhaps not.

OLIVIA (*piercingly*). Don't you like him?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Olivia—I beg your pardon—

OLIVIA (*ardently*). Oh, yes, Olivia—Olivia always.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Philip Somers is nobility itself. But he isn't humanly real; he's a character in a novel—a novel that he invents as he goes along. And, what is worse, he is determined that you shall be the other character in his novel.

OLIVIA. Couldn't one beat him at that? Couldn't one make him the other character in one's own novel?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. I couldn't.

OLIVIA. You wanted to?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*unaffectedly*). At one time very much. (*Olivia again looks keenly at her.*)

OLIVIA (*following her own thoughts*). When I asked him if I might see you, he said "Yes" at once. Not many men would have done that. (*She apparently refers the point to Mrs. Edgecombe.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with her ironic smile*). Perhaps only one. (*A pause.*) Did you like him for saying "Yes" at once?

OLIVIA. I admired him.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*again with her indulgent irony*). Ah, that's just it.

OLIVIA (*once more wrestling with her own thoughts*). Yet I think—I don't know—that if he hadn't said "Yes," if he'd taken me in his arms and said, "Decide now and here," I should have decided—for him, I mean.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. *He* couldn't do that.

OLIVIA. There is one thing more I want to ask you. It's wrong, but I must. Did he urge you to speak for him just now?

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*smiling*). He almost urged me to speak against him.

OLIVIA. He asked that?

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Well, not quite that. He wanted to ask me not to spare him.

OLIVIA. Ah! (*She walks with a free, yet preoccupied step to a bookcase at the left, and feigns to scan the titles.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*tentatively*). That was rather noble in him.

OLIVIA (*forcibly, but absently*). Very. (*She takes out a book, and opens it without looking at the page.*) I shouldn't call it particularly loverlike.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*rationally*). One can't have everything.

OLIVIA. That's no reason why one shouldn't have the thing one especially wants.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. One especially wants so many things.

OLIVIA (*putting the book back with contemptuous energy*). Mrs. Edgecombe, is a man who wants a thing bound in honor to act exactly like a man who doesn't want it? (*She clasps and unclasps her hands in two rapid, almost undivided movements.*) I—I wish he'd *begged* you to speak for him.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*smiling, but not derisive*). He's Philip Somers.

OLIVIA (*crossing swiftly to Mrs. Edgecombe and taking both her hands*). You have been—oh, you've been—I shall never forget it.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*half to herself*). Have I been wise, I wonder?

OLIVIA (*ardently*). Yes, yes! Beautifully wise! Goodbye. (*She gives Mrs. Edgecombe's hand a last warm pressure, and starts for the door. She stops midway.*) Oh, I forgot. I'm quite decided. I shan't marry him.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*rising, almost in dismay*). But why, my dear? Why?

OLIVIA (*flashing at her a bright glance*). *He* will tell you that. (*She goes out. Mrs. Edgecombe remains standing for some seconds thoughtful in the middle of the room. Then she walks to the telephone.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*speaking into the tube*). If Mr. Somers—the gentleman who was here—asks to see me again, send him up directly. (*She drops the receiver, goes to the piano, strikes a musing note or two, and returns to her chair. Before she has time to seat herself, the bell is heard.*) Come in.

PHILIP SOMERS (*entering back, and coming to Mrs. Edgecombe*). She has rejected me, Katherine.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Why?

PHILIP SOMERS. She said *you* would tell me.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. She said almost that to me.

PHILIP SOMERS. I don't understand.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. She said *you* would tell *me*.

PHILIP SOMERS. That is odd. What could she mean? (*He makes one impulsive step toward Mrs. Edgecombe, then checks himself.*)

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with a certain demureness under her superiority*). She is a romantic girl.

PHILIP SOMERS (*vaguely disappointed*). Yes, altogether romantic.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. You and I can smile at that, Philip.

PHILIP SOMERS. Yes. No. Can *you?*

MRS EDGECOMBE (*briskly*). Certainly. The romance turned inside out becomes the comedy. We get two plays for our money.

PHILIP SOMERS (*not heeding her*). When I called her romantic, I was thinking of you.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Yes, and I was thinking of you when *I* called her romantic. We are even, you see.

PHILIP SOMERS (*falteringly*). About me she—she was quite right.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*after a silence, in a low voice*). Did I say she was quite wrong about me?

PHILIP SOMERS (*advancing another step*). Katherine, I wonder sometimes if women ever know how much a man wants a thing when he wants it.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*dropping her eyes*). They guess a little now and then.

PHILIP SOMERS. Guess? Never. You would think me lying or mad if I began to tell you how much—after all the years, the break, the trouble—I still want you.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*experimentally, as she draws back*). Philip, is this generous?

PHILIP SOMERS (*beatenly*). God help me! I don't know.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*still testing him*). You've stopped being generous, then?

PHILIP SOMERS (*desperately*). I'm a dog. I want you.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Not at my cost surely? Not unless it's for *my* good?

PHILIP SOMERS. I've sunk pretty low at this moment, Katherine. I want you anyhow. (*She turns away slowly.*) I know you despise me, and you're quite right. Goodbye.

MRS. EDGECOMBE. Just a minute. (*Philip comes back.*) Philip, when a man wants a thing as much as you do now, when he forgets his conscience and his ideals for its sake—

PHILIP SOMERS (*with bowed head*). I know. I know.

MRS. EDGECOMBE (*with severity*). Then, you see, if he has a real woman to deal with (*she puts her hand with the lightest possible touch upon his shoulder, and turns to look into his eyes*) he sometimes gets it.

CURTAIN

THE EMERALDS

CHARACTERS

JULIA DOANE — WENTWORTH MORDAUNT
AGNES FAIRFIELD — WINIFRED MORDAUNT, *his wife*
CECILY MORDAUNT, *his daughter by a former marriage*

Place and time: New York in our own day.

The curtain rises on the dimly lighted living-room of Mrs. Doane's and Mrs. Fairfield's flat, a room in which subdued elegance has been achieved at a cost whose moderation is a point in the elegance. At rear centre, fireplace with mantel, antique candlesticks, and a clock distinctly marking half-past-four. Entrance door at right, two doors at left, leading to bedrooms and dining-room. Tea-table down stage at left of centre; in left-hand wall near the front, tiny china-closet through the glass door of which three cups suspended by the handles are just visible. At the tea-table two chairs at back and left side; at the right, but farther off, a roomily attractive easy-chair. Other furniture of an unobtrusive sort in the required places.

Cecily Mordaunt, a girl of ten in street dress, enters at right, presses a button, turning on a half-light, skips across to the doors left, opens, looks, and listens, and is back with a spring to the entrance door.

CECILY (*speaking to some one without*). Nobody. Nobody at all. Come in.

VOICE FROM WITHOUT. Oh, I *mustn't* come in. (*Winifred Mordaunt, twenty-eight, effectively dressed and handsome, enters the room. At the moment of entrance, and, in less degree, afterward, she has the falteringly eager air of a*

woman who has allowed an irrepressible curiosity to overcome both fear and scruple, and who is humorous enough to be obscurely exhilarated by the conflict.)

CECILY. Do come in. It's a joke, isn't it? They think I'm safe at papa's till Monday morning.

WINIFRED (*loosening her wrap just enough to disclose a cluster of costly emeralds at her throat*). I ought to have kept you with me, Cecily, even if your father couldn't be there. Perhaps they don't want you. (*She is looking round her with a guilty eagerness.*)

CECILY. Oh, they want me. They *like* me. Won't you sit down?

WINIFRED (*horrified by the suggestion*). No indeed. I shall take one look around and go. You're sure—quite sure, Cecily—that they've gone to the matinee?

CECILY. They go to the matinee every Saturday. And mamma said she wouldn't miss *The Plover's Egg* for a new sealskin.

WINIFRED (*looking at the clock*). It's twenty-five minutes of five. If they should come— (*She can complete neither the sentence nor the idea.*) There's no way out but this? (*She glances toward the entrance.*)

CECILY (*dubiously*). There's the fire-escape.

WINIFRED (*her humor barely emerging*). Is there really? I'll stay another minute.

CECILY (*amused*). They'd like *you.*

WINIFRED (*appalled*). Would they? (*She looks toward the entrance.*) I *ought* to go. (*She turns toward Cecily.*) *You're* going to like me, aren't you, Cecily?

CECILY (*very promptly*). Yes, I shall. You're nice, too. I like you all. (*There is something so overwhelming to Winifred in this obviously friendly and innocent speech that she finds expression and repression almost equally difficult. She turns for relief to the furniture.*)

WINIFRED (*with discontented admiration*). It's very pretty.

CECILY. Shall I turn on the other light? Mother Agnes always likes it this way.

WINIFRED (*delighted to repudiate Mother Agnes*). I should like the full light, if you please, Cecily. (*Cecily improves the light. Winifred wanders about the room with critical pauses, her agitation barely held in check by curiosity. She tests a Bokhara rug with a daintily shod foot.*) The rugs are good. (*Her disappointment at the goodness of the rugs is palpable.*)

CECILY. Mother Agnes chose them. (*Winifred draws her foot away abruptly.*) She chose everything. Except the candlesticks.

WINIFRED (*who has been testing the curtains*). The candlesticks!

CECILY (*pointing to the mantel*). Yes. Don't you like them?

WINIFRED (*with sacrificial generosity*). They're quite charming.

CECILY. Mamma brought them from Fer—Ferrara.

WINIFRED. Was your mother in Italy very long?

CECILY. Mamma, you mean?

WINIFRED (*in pardonable uncertainty*). I—I think so. (*She smiles in answer to Cecily's laugh.*)

CECILY. Mamma was in Italy five years. That was when Mother Agnes took care of me.

WINIFRED. And she chooses all the furniture?

CECILY. Yes. Mamma helps pay for it of course.

WINIFRED (*giving the devil his due*). She *has* good taste.

CECILY. She chose the furniture at papa's, too. Don't you like that?

WINIFRED (*happy in a vent for criticism*). I don't like the salmon woodwork.

CECILY. Oh, that isn't Mother Agnes' choice; that's papa's. He had all the workwork repainted after—

WINIFRED (*gently, but arrestingly*). I know, Cecily.

CECILY (*broaching another topic*). Did you and papa have a wedding-trip?

WINIFRED. We've put it off. Your father was too busy.

CECILY. What makes papa so busy?

WINIFRED. His firm is opening up a branch office in Toledo. That's why he couldn't stay to see you this afternoon.

CECILY (*looking at her wrist*). He didn't need to give me the bracelet just for that. But it was nice of papa.

WINIFRED. He's very good, Cecily. (*As Cecily does not reply.*) Isn't he?

CECILY (*obligingly*). Yes, he's very good.

WINIFRED (*not relishing the obligation*). You know you mustn't let (*she hesitates*)—let anyone come between you and your father, Cecily.

CECILY. Anyone?

WINIFRED (*embarrassed*). I mean—do they talk to you about your father?

CECILY. Mamma? Mother Agnes? No, they don't talk to me about papa. Or—or just once in a while.

WINIFRED. Once in a while?

CECILY. You see they did speak of him once last week. They were laughing. Their checks came by the same mail.

WINIFRED (*revolted*). Oh!

CECILY. Mother Agnes said he was always punctual, and mamma, (*she lifts her eyes deliberatively to Winifred's*) I suppose it wasn't very nice in mamma—

WINIFRED. I'm not asking you to tell me what she said, Cecily.

CECILY (*undiscouraged*). Mamma said he would be punctual at his own funeral. (*With an air of confession.*) I laughed, you know. I didn't mean to be disrespectful to papa, but Mother Agnes laughed, and I thought I could.

WINIFRED. Do you like Mrs. Fairfield better than your own mother?

CECILY (*puzzled*). I don't know about liking—mamma's very jolly. But Mother Agnes—she looks out for me, you know.

WINIFRED. Now?

CECILY (*surprised at Winifred's surprise*). Yes. Mamma couldn't look after people.

WINIFRED. They—they get on together? (*With sudden remorse.*) I didn't mean to ask that, Cecily. I shall be quite angry with you if you answer me.

CECILY (*appraising this veto at its exact worth*). They get on beautifully. Of course mamma spends too much. Mamma *would*.

WINIFRED. And Mrs. Fairfield likes to save money?

CECILY. Yes—a little. She thought mamma paid too much for the pearl beads. (*Cecily's eyes wander to Winifred's throat.*) Do you like precious stones?

WINIFRED (*smiling*). Yes. Don't you?

CECILY (*with frank interest*). Did papa give you those emeralds?

WINIFRED. Yes. Four weeks ago.

CECILY (*with meditative yearning*). They're very pretty.

WINIFRED (*divining the little girl's wish*). Do you want to see them, Cecily?

CECILY. Oh, may I?

WINIFRED (*loosening the clasp and passing the emeralds to Cecily*). Just for a second, my dear; I have to go.

CECILY. Oh, don't go. (*She is about to seat herself at the tea-table to examine the jewels when she recollects that Winifred is standing. She hesitates.*) Won't—won't you sit down? (*She points to the chair at right of tea-table.*) That's a very nice chair.

WINIFRED. I mustn't sit down—really. Is that your mother's chair?

CECILY (*seating herself and fingering the emeralds*). No, nobody sits there.

WINIFRED. Nobody?

CECILY. No. That is, anybody might, but nobody does.

This is mamma's chair, and that is Mother Agnes', and I don't take tea.

WINIFRED. But why do they have a chair that nobody sits in?

CECILY (*smiling*). It's a joke, I guess. They say—you won't think I'm silly?

WINIFRED. Certainly not.

CECILY. They say it's for *her.*

WINIFRED. For her?

CECILY. Yes.

WINIFRED. But for whom?

CECILY. They won't tell me. I think mamma would tell if I should ask her when we're by ourselves, but I—I shouldn't like to coax things out of mamma.

WINIFRED. You really are a good child, Cecily.

CECILY. I think it's some friend of theirs who is coming to stay with them some day.

WINIFRED. Probably.

CECILY (*ensnared by the charm of revelation*). She has a cup, too.

WINIFRED. Indeed! She has quite an establishment.

CECILY (*rising, and pointing to one of the three cups in the china-closet*). That's her cup—the one with the silver fern and the blue humming-bird.

WINIFRED (*approaching the closet*). And do they never use that cup?

CECILY. No. This is Mother Agnes' and this is mamma's. They've left the prettiest for her.

WINIFRED (*vaguely uncomfortable*). Have you finished with the emeralds, Cecily? I really must go.

CECILY (*imploringly*). Oh, just one minute. (*Winifred, resuming her walk, stops in front of an etching on the wall left. Cecily sits down. Silence. The jewels in Cecily's hands sound faintly now and then. The clock ticks audibly.*

Suddenly another little sound punctures the stillness,—the sound of a key turning in a lock.)

WINIFRED (*with a shriek in the key of a whisper*). Cecily!

CECILY (*rising, dismayed, not by the sound of the key, but by Winifred's face and voice*). It can't be they. It's only five o'clock. (*She leaves the emeralds on the tea-table, and goes toward the entrance door.*)

WINIFRED (*gasping*). Cecily, turn off—part of the light. (*Cecily presses one button, producing a half-light, and leaves the room. Winifred, left alone, approaches the nearer of the left-hand doors, recoils, turns, makes two steps toward the fire-escape, then, realizing the futility of struggle, stands quietly, one hand upon the tea-table, awaiting the result. The next nine speeches are off-stage.*)

CECILY. Mamma! Are you back already?

JULIA. *We!* What are *you* back for?

CECILY. Papa had a telegram. He's gone to Toledo.

AGNES. How long have you been here, Cecily?

CECILY (*a little tremulously*). Half an hour.

AGNES. All alone?

CECILY. No—not quite.

JULIA. Not quite. What do you mean by that?

CECILY (*in a troubled voice*). I—I will show you, Mamma. (*Cecily enters, followed by Julia Doane and Agnes Fairfield. In the half-light little can be seen of Winifred but the erect and motionless figure, resting one hand upon the tea-table. At the sight the entering women pause.*)

CECILY (*at centre*). Mamma—Mother Agnes—(*she pauses, then, with childish sagacity, solves fairly well a problem that might have staggered a diplomatist*) this is—papa's wife.

JULIA (*recovering her presence of mind after the briefest possible start, and crossing to Winifred with both hands extended*). This is charming of you, Mrs. Mordaunt. Mrs. Fairfield and I have often wished to meet you.

AGNES. So nice of you to come! (*The cordiality in her voice*

is unobtrusive, almost incidental. She perceives that Julia, though tactful, has slightly magnified an occasion which it would have been still more tactful to attenuate.)

WINIFRED (*struggling with her dismay*). My being here—it's quite—quite impossible.

AGNES. You can't scare us with the impossible, Mrs. Mordaunt. We've just come from the matinee.

WINIFRED (*scarcely hearing her*). Mr. Mordaunt was out of town. I brought Cecily home. And she—she invited me to come in. So— (*She finishes the explanation by a gesture. When the difficult words are out, she is amazed to see how socially presentable this perfectly correct account of a monstrous fact turns out to be.*)

JULIA. Very right of you.

AGNES (*subtly discriminative*). Very good of her, you mean, Julia.

JULIA (*taking off her wraps, and throwing them carelessly into a chair*). I mean whatever you say I mean, Agnes, particularly if it's anything nice about Mrs. Mordaunt.

AGNES (*who has taken off her own wraps carefully, but not over-carefully*). Cecily dear, hang up those things, will you?

CECILY (*with the wraps upon her arm*). Did you come away before the play was over?

JULIA. Yes, Cecily. The second act seemed to be—conclusive. (*This last is for Winifred. Cecily goes out right, and returns almost immediately.*)

WINIFRED (*perfunctorily*). So many plays are over before they're through. (*She has begun to realize with dismay that her escape is a trap, that, in fleeing to the shelter of the convenances, she has made of those very convenances a barrier between these women and her wifely indignation.*)

JULIA (*making talk*). We're very fond of the theatre. We take each other turn and turn about. I take Agnes to the orchestra. When it's her turn, she takes me to the middle

section of the first balcony. There you have our two characters—on a thumbnail.

AGNES. Julia's thumbnail.

WINIFRED (*gropingly*). I should think the contrast would amuse you both.

JULIA. It does. Agnes' attitude toward money is devout, while I—

AGNES. While you, Julia, take me to the orchestra by borrowing the three dollars I have saved by taking you to the balcony.

JULIA. And now, Mrs. Mordaunt, you must positively sit down and take a cup of tea.

WINIFRED (*distressed*). No, no, I couldn't sit down, thank you.

AGNES (*seeing Winifred's perturbation*). We have a chair that you can't resist. (*Agnes and Julia are at the right of the tea-table.*)

JULIA. This one. (*She indicates the chair that Cecily had shown to Winifred.*) We call it the quicksand.

WINIFRED. The quicksand?

JULIA. When you get in, you can't get out, it's so comfortable. Do try it.

WINIFRED. That's—that's hardly an inducement, is it? (*Agnes and Julia both laugh lightly.*)

AGNES. You owe us some amends for that. Sit down—anywhere.

WINIFRED (*seized by a horrible fear that she is beginning to like these women*). For just a minute. (*She seats herself in the smallest, frailest, and least comfortable chair in sight. It is close to the roomy chair.*)

JULIA. And now we positively must have some tea. Cecily, fetch the cups.

WINIFRED. Oh, I—I couldn't— (*But her voice is drowned in the small stir produced by Cecily's response to Julia's wish.*)

CECILY (*opening the door of the china-closet*). *Three* cups, mamma?

JULIA. Three cups, of course. Do you think three people are going to drink tea out of two cups? I wonder who can have brought you up. (*She looks mockingly at Agnes.*)

WINIFRED (*looking at the third cup in Cecily's hand as if it were the eye of a rattlesnake*). You're very kind, but I really can't take tea.

JULIA. Is there any hot water, Cecily?

CECILY. I think so, mamma.

JULIA. Fetch it, dear. (*Cecily goes out, and presently returns with the hot water.*) You simply must try our tea, Mrs. Mordaunt. Agnes shall make it for you. (*Agnes sits at left, Julia at back of tea-table.*)

AGNES. Do have some. You shall disapprove of us all you like.

JULIA. But you shan't suspect our tea. The wicked have excellent tea.

AGNES. Julia speaks as an expert.

WINIFRED (*hesitatingly*). In—in tea, or in— (*The two hostesses laugh.*)

JULIA. In both, Mrs. Mordaunt. But I have great faith in our tea—when Agnes makes it. I believe our tea will rehabilitate us.

WINIFRED. You couldn't expect me to—to help in that process, could you? (*Again Julia and Agnes laugh, and the situation assumes a cosiness which frightens the repentant Winifred.*)

AGNES. She has us there, Julia? (*To Winifred.*) You really won't have any? Well, we won't urge you. There, Julia. (*She serves Julia and herself.*)

JULIA (*drinking*). It *is* good. If I were this tea, and had been snubbed so unfeelingly by Mrs. Mordaunt, I should—*boil.* (*Winifred's nervous strain releases itself in sudden laughter.*)

WINIFRED. I'm sure the tea is delicious. (*Cecily comes to Julia's side.*)

JULIA (*to Cecily, fondly, but gibingly*). What do *you* want?

CECILY. Mamma, did you bring the theatre program?

JULIA. Yes, I put it in the chair—with my cloak. (*Cecily finds the program in the now empty chair.*)

WINIFRED (*grateful for a topic*). Is she so interested in the plays?

JULIA. No, I'm ashamed to say the child cuts out all the Rogers-Peet advertisements. They have a pun on the title of the play. Cecily!

CECILY. Yes, mamma.

JULIA. Take your scissors into the dining-room, and cut out the advertisement there. (*Propitiatingly.*) There are some salted pecans in the yellow box in the cupboard. You can have some of them.

CECILY (*with perfect temper, but with perceptible insistence*). But, mamma, I want to stay here—with you. (*The "with you" is added diplomatically. Julia looks at Agnes.*)

AGNES (*to Cecily*). Go, my dear. (*Cecily instantly rises and moves toward the further door left.*) And—Cecily!

CECILY (*turning in the doorway*). Yes?

AGNES. You ate a great many of those salted pecans for lunch. I wouldn't take any more now.

CECILY. All right, Mother Agnes. (*Julia looks whimsically at Winifred.*)

JULIA. You see, Mrs. Mordaunt. That's what I live with,—seven days in the week and thirty days in the month. When there are thirty-one days in the month, I live with it thirty-one days. That's how I live. And I've had nothing—literally nothing—to bear me up except this tea, and (*she turns with a bright glance toward Winifred*) the hope of seeing Mrs. Mordaunt.

WINIFRED (*not quite knowing how to meet this*). Cecily is a dear little girl.

JULIA (*dropping her folded hands with mock resignation into her lap, and looking at Agnes*). I'm sure Agnes should be very grateful to you.

AGNES (*coolly*). I am.

JULIA. Isn't she shameless?

AGNES (*explaining to Winifred*). Cecily is a good girl, but I have to be rather strict with her. When one has to combat heredity— (*She looks with grave mischief at Julia.*)

JULIA (*putting her arms on the table, and leaning forward*). On which side?

AGNES (*looking significantly at Winifred*). You forget, Julia.

JULIA. I think you forgot, Agnes.

AGNES (*tactfully*). I'm sure neither of us forgot anything which a friend of Mrs. Mordaunt's should have remembered. (*A pause. Agnes breaks it by a courageous question.*) Mr. Mordaunt is well, I hope?

WINIFRED (*relieved by this frankness*). He is very well,—busy, but quite well.

AGNES. He looks well. We have seen him once or twice with you—in the theatre.

JULIA. It must have been a queer moment when Wentworth (*Interrupting herself to speak to Agnes.*) Well? (*She studies Agnes' face.*) Oh! Do you see that—that circumflex in Agnes' left eyebrow? (*She is once more speaking to Winifred.*) That means all sorts of things. Just now it means Mr. Mordaunt. I'm not to call him Wentworth.

WINIFRED (*resolving to assert herself*). My husband was much distressed by your—your being together.

JULIA. In the theatre?

WINIFRED (*bravely*). Anywhere.

AGNES. Why, Mrs. Mordaunt, if you'll excuse my asking?

WINIFRED. It seemed—a conspiracy.

JULIA. I understand perfectly. Divorced wives are back numbers. When they're flung away casually, there's no harm done. But when they're *on file,* so to speak—

AGNES (*in a sugared tone*). Haven't you said all you want to, Julia?

JULIA (*stoutly*). Not quite. When they're on file, the situation has its suggestions for the—the *current* wife.

AGNES (*sincerely reproachful*). Marriage isn't a periodical, Julia.

WINIFRED (*in a firm, low tone, to Julia*). I love my husband, Mrs. Doane.

JULIA. I was quite wrong to say that, Mrs. Mordaunt, and I am very sorry. Agnes and I don't take these things quite so gravely as you do. And Wentworth—I will call him Wentworth, Agnes—with his tragic view of the situation makes it seem a little comic for us.

WINIFRED (*still more gravely*). I respect my husband, Mrs. Doane.

AGNES (*placatingly*). I think we all respect him. There are excellent points in Mr. Mordaunt.

JULIA. That's what I'm always saying.

AGNES (*with pointed suavity*). Suppose you leave off saying it for half a minute, dear.

JULIA. Just one word. I've always wanted to be just to Wentworth, and the reason why I left him was that I found that I couldn't be just to him while—while he was around. It seemed only fair to him to go. (*Winifred makes a gesture of what might be described as supplicating impatience.*)

AGNES (*seeking a diversion*). I think that Wentworth—I beg your pardon—

WINIFRED. Oh, call him what you like. What does it matter?

AGNES. I think Wentworth is quite wrong if he supposes that Julia and I have banded together against him. The matter was really very simple. Julia wanted to be with Cecily—that was natural enough. Cecily wanted to be with me—I had brought her up, while Julia was—

JULIA. Gipsying?

AGNES. Thank you. While Julia was gipsying in Italy. It

seemed natural for the three of us to live together, and it seemed all the more natural because I was fond of Julia.

WINIFRED (*with reluctant understanding*). I see the idea. It gives Cecily two mothers.

JULIA. I should say that it gave Agnes two children.

AGNES. Two delightful children—one of them very wilful.

WINIFRED. But here—in New York—under his eyes!

JULIA. Well, there was Cecily. He wouldn't have liked it if we'd taken her off to Honolulu.

WINIFRED (*not without generosity*). You had reasons. There's so much that one doesn't understand. (*She leans her elbow thoughtfully upon the table, making her hand a cup for her chin.*)

AGNES (*judicially*). I don't think we were spiting Wentworth. We *do* laugh at him sometimes. I suppose that seems inexcusable to you.

WINIFRED (*with a rueful smile*). I'm beginning to excuse everything. I certainly must go. (*She removes her hand from her chin. In its descent it chances to touch her throat, and she has a vague sense of the absence of some customary object. She looks round inquiringly.*)

AGNES. Something lost?

WINIFRED. My—my emeralds. I let Cecily take them.

AGNES. These? (*She holds up the emeralds, which have been screened by a cup and saucer.*)

WINIFRED (*taking them*). Oh, thank you. They are my husband's present. (*She replaces them at her throat.*)

JULIA (*critically*). They look very well at the throat. I used to wear them in my hair.

WINIFRED (*pricked*). You!

JULIA. Oh, they're experienced, those emeralds. They're coated with associations. Agnes, you wore them on your wrist, didn't you?

AGNES (*disapprovingly*). I wore them very little, as you know, Julia.

WINIFRED (*with a little gasp*). He told me they were his mother's jewels.

JULIA. I think they were. But their adventures began with us.

WINIFRED (*after brief hesitation*). Tell me all about them, Mrs. Doane.

JULIA. Shall I, Agnes?

AGNES (*with mild repressiveness*). You know perfectly well what I think, Julia.

JULIA (*to Winifred, with humorous resignation*). You see.

WINIFRED (*deliberately unclasping the emeralds, and letting them fall upon the table*). Unless you tell me the whole story, I shall not put on those emeralds again. If I have to wear them, I should know their history.

JULIA. Well, Agnes?

AGNES (*after a moment's thought*). Mrs. Mordaunt, if you insist on knowing, I suppose we must tell you. You will imagine dreadful things if we don't, and there is really nothing scandalous in the story except perhaps—

WINIFRED. Except—

AGNES. Except Julia's taking them to the pawnbroker.

JULIA. He was a Fifth Avenue pawnbroker.

AGNES. Does that make any difference?

JULIA. I thought it did. You see, Mrs. Mordaunt, I had to get away. You remember Barrie, don't you?—"The Twelve-Pound Look"?

WINIFRED. Yes.

JULIA. Well, I hadn't even a typewriter. I hadn't anything —but the emeralds. And I pawned them. Agnes has always said it was indefensible. Perhaps it was. (*She passes her hand lingeringly over the jewels, a movement which is closely watched by Winifred.*) They *did* look very becoming in my hair.

AGNES. You know I don't mean that.

WINIFRED. And you redeemed them, and sent them back to Wentworth?

JULIA (*dismissing this suggestion with a regretful sense of its attractiveness*). No. *He* redeemed them—when he found out where they were. I have always thought that was handsome in Wentworth. He paid, in a way, for my escape.

WINIFRED. And you let him?

JULIA. He didn't ask to be let. He wanted the emeralds for Agnes.

AGNES. He had just married me, you see, and when I found out that the emeralds had helped another woman to leave his house, I—I didn't like the omen. (*She glances with a slight disquiet at Winifred.*)

WINIFRED (*pushing the jewels a tenth of an inch from her by a barely perceptible movement*). I—I didn't know, you see.

AGNES (*reassured*). I wore them very little. I thought my reluctance was wifely. He didn't. He urged me, and there was tension. In those days I was impulsive, and one day, to end the matter, I wrapped up the emeralds and sent them back to Julia.

WINIFRED. Without telling him?

AGNES (*smiling*). I told him—afterward. And Wentworth was—I don't know what to call it—mountainous. He didn't rage exactly; he doesn't rage. But he loomed and gloomed—you know how he is. (*She turns to Winifred with the confidence of a fellow-adventurer.*)

WINIFRED (*faintly*). Ye—e—s.

AGNES. After that he wrote to Julia.

JULIA. I've kept his letters.

AGNES. He asked her (*she lowers her voice a little*) to restore the emeralds. (*Winifred pushes the jewels from her a little more decisively.*)

JULIA. You didn't like that?

AGNES. It didn't—*gratify* me. (*She takes up her teaspoon,*

and taps the side of her cup twice with it, with a pensive interval between the taps.)

JULIA. And I finally wrote to him that I would restore the emeralds without price to Mrs. Mordaunt if she would come to my flat and get them.

AGNES. I didn't want to go. Of course at that time I felt toward Julia just as—just as you feel toward us.

WINIFRED (*correctingly*). As I *did* feel, Mrs. Fairfield.

AGNES (*gratefully*). Thank you. We had—a difference. Wentworth never quarrels. And I yielded. I shouldn't have yielded. I think a little stubbornness might have saved our marriage. But I went.

WINIFRED. And then?

AGNES. Then came the unexpected.

WINIFRED. Mrs. Doane was unwilling to give up the emeralds?

AGNES. Oh, no. Julia gave up the emeralds at once, but she —*kept me.*

WINIFRED (*with a start*). Kept you?

AGNES. No, no, I stayed. Julia wasn't responsible.

JULIA. I was.

WINIFRED (*rising involuntarily*). And you never went back?

AGNES. No.

WINIFRED (*gaspingly*). I must go.

AGNES (*softly*). It isn't late. (*The clock becomes audible in the laden silence.*)

WINIFRED. I really must. (*She turns as if to go.*)

AGNES (*rising and pointing to the table*). Your emeralds? (*Winifred turns, takes up the jewels, then lets them fall through her hand slightingly, even scornfully, to the table.*)

WINIFRED (*resuming her seat without explanation*). Tell me the rest of it.

AGNES. There isn't much more. We sent the emeralds back to Wentworth. (*She sits again.*)

WINIFRED. And you've lived together ever since?

AGNES. No, we hardly began really to live together till some time afterward. Julia was just back from Italy, and had to go to Pasadena to visit her parents. I was alone in New York for some time,—that is, until Cecily came.

WINIFRED. How came he to let you have Cecily?

AGNES. I think he let Cecily have me. The child was, I think, very fond of me, and she was seriously ill after I went away. Wentworth's business kept him largely out of town in those days; he let Cecily come to me for a visit, and the visit hasn't stopped.

JULIA. He wouldn't have let *me* have her.

AGNES. I don't suppose he'd have let me have a daughter of my own. But in letting me have Julia's daughter, he didn't feel that he was yielding so very much to either of us. I don't think he knew how much I cared for Cecily.

WINIFRED. But afterwards—when you and Mrs. Doane came to live together?

AGNES. He didn't like that, but it was hard to object. If he could spare Cecily to anybody, why refuse her to her own mother? (*Telephone rings in the further room at left.*)

JULIA. Cecily! Answer the telephone, will you, dear?

CECILY (*offstage*). Yes, mamma.

AGNES (*resuming her topic*). Wentworth can be obliging. He has been obliging about Cecily.

JULIA. That's what I've always said.

AGNES. Yes, dear. It's true, nevertheless. (*Cecily appears in further doorway left.*)

CECILY. Mother Agnes!

AGNES. Well, dear?

CECILY. It's—it's *papa.* (*The three women start, Winifred rather less than the two others.*) He's downstairs.

AGNES (*restraining herself before Cecily*). Does he want to come up?

CECILY. No, he asks Mrs. Mordaunt to come down. (*Meditatively.*) He didn't say "asks"—it was something prettier.

I know—"begs." Papa has very nice words. (*There is a silence during which Agnes and Julia look, but look, as it were, unurgingly, at Winifred.*)

WINIFRED (*in a low tone*). Should you mind asking him—*to come up?*

AGNES (*reflectively*). Would he come up?

WINIFRED. He might.

JULIA. No fear. If she doesn't come down, he'll come up—without asking.

AGNES (*foreseeingly, to Winifred*). Wouldn't it pain you?

WINIFRED. It would pain me,—yes. But I wish it, unless—(*she looks at both women*) it would pain you.

JULIA (*frankly*). I should enjoy it.

AGNES. Oh, if Julia is going to enjoy it—

JULIA. Don't worry. I shall be moderate in my joy.

AGNES (*kindly, almost affectionately, to Winifred*). You're quite sure it's what you want?

WINIFRED (*gratefully*). Quite, thank you.

AGNES. Cecily, ask your father to come up. Tell him Mrs. Mordaunt asks him to. (*Cecily disappears.*)

WINIFRED (*with effort*). There's a little point I should like to settle with him here. I—mightn't have strength for it—in another place.

CECILY (*reappearing*). Papa is coming up. He—he didn't want to.

AGNES. Perhaps not. Cecily, we have some important things to talk over with your father. I think you had better go across the hall and play with Mary Fulton.

CECILY. But I should like to see papa. I haven't thanked him for the bracelet.

AGNES. Very well. Go down and fetch him up. But when you've let him in, go and play with Mary for a while. That's a good child.

CECILY (*with a pout that is half dimple*). All right. (*She goes out right.*)

JULIA (*for the sake of saying something*). Agnes, the inducements to obedience that you offer to the modern child are mediæval.

AGNES. I didn't know I'd offered any inducements.

JULIA. You say "that's a good child."

AGNES. Well, I'm old-fashioned no doubt. I still think obedience a virtue. In a child of yours, Julia, I should think it a quite extraordinary virtue. (*A brief knock, rather imperative than suppliant, is heard at the entrance right, and is followed without interval by the appearance of Wentworth Mordaunt, an erect and dignified man, with a large physique and large manner, the self-restraint of which he can turn into a weapon of offense. He recognizes the presence of Julia and Agnes with a bow that is at once elaborate and slighting.*)

JULIA. How do you do, Wentworth?

AGNES (*blandly*). How do you do?

WENTWORTH (*distantly*). I am perfectly well. (*His glance searches the room for Winifred. An instant passes before he ascertains her presence.*)

JULIA (*following his eyes*). We're all here, Wentworth.

AGNES. Hush, Julia.

WINIFRED (*almost without embarrassment*). It is really you, Wentworth? You didn't go to Toledo?

WENTWORTH. The telegram was revoked.

WINIFRED. They told you at the house where I had gone?

WENTWORTH. Yes. I see that you—or others—have profited by my absence. (*He looks at Agnes and Julia.*)

AGNES (*in her easy way*). *We* have profited certainly by a few minutes' very pleasant chat with Mrs. Mordaunt. Won't you sit down? (*She points to a chair.*)

JULIA. No, this one, Agnes. He liked a low chair in my time.

WENTWORTH. Thank you, I can stand perfectly well while Mrs. Mordaunt takes her leave of you. (*He retreats right*

a step or two. Winifred has turned her chair enough to allow her to face him when she chooses.)

WINIFRED (*deaf to Wentworth's hint*). These ladies have had nothing to do with my being here, Wentworth.

WENTWORTH. Are you sure of that? I think you are less than just—to their intelligence.

WINIFRED (*continuing her explanation*). I brought Cecily back. Her friends were at the matinee. She asked me to come upstairs.

WENTWORTH. I fail to see what my wife had to do in this place whether invited or not.

WINIFRED. I was curious about the place. (*She looks up into Wentworth's unrelaxing features.*) A man couldn't understand.

AGNES (*unobtrusively kind*). Any woman could.

JULIA. She was curious just as a good boy, a pattern boy, who goes to Sunday-school, is curious about a robbers' cave. You couldn't keep the boy out of the cave if he knew the robbers weren't there.

WENTWORTH (*portentously*). The simile is just.

AGNES. It was by chance that Mrs. Mordaunt even saw us. We came home early from the matinee.

WENTWORTH (*glancing at the table*). It was by chance that she drank tea with you?

WINIFRED. I haven't had any tea.

JULIA (*observing Wentworth's half-believing look*). Count the cups if you like, Wentworth.

WENTWORTH. The tea doesn't matter. Nothing will persuade me that it is either chance or her own will that has brought my wife into the one place in New York where it is superlatively improper for her to be.

AGNES. I don't think anybody's to blame, but, if you must blame somebody, let it be Julia and me by all means. Mrs. Mordaunt found herself in our company by chance, and we urged her to stay.

WENTWORTH (*whose eye has been caught during this speech by another object lying on the table*). Your only motive was hospitality?

AGNES. Yes.

WENTWORTH (*pointing to the emeralds*). How does it happen that my wife's jewels are on your table?

WINIFRED (*warningly*). Wentworth!

WENTWORTH. My dear, these emeralds have a painful history, a history to which these friends of yours hoped to add a a concluding chapter this afternoon.

WINIFRED. Wentworth, neither Mrs. Doane nor Mrs. Fairfield were here when I took off the emeralds. I took them off to show to Cecily.

WENTWORTH. How long since?

WINIFRED (*with deepening coldness*). This isn't a police court, is it?

WENTWORTH. It is a place to which you have invited me, my dear.

WINIFRED. I had a reason. I had something to say to you, Wentworth.

WENTWORTH (*impressively*). We have a house, Winifred.

WINIFRED. Something that I wish to say before I leave this place.

WENTWORTH. Say it quickly, then.

WINIFRED (*taking up and immediately dropping the emeralds*). I have heard the story of these jewels.

WENTWORTH (*encompassing Julia and Agnes in a profoundly ironic glance*). No doubt.

WINIFRED (*quietly*). I should like to leave them here.

WENTWORTH. Here?

WINIFRED. With Mrs. Doane and Mrs. Fairfield. I don't feel that they are mine.

WENTWORTH (*again raking Julia and Agnes with a scorn that triumphs, as it were, in its own justice*). I arrived in time.

JULIA. If you mean that you arrived in time, Wentworth, to

make Mrs. Mordaunt very uncomfortable, and yourself a little—shall we say ridiculous?—I quite agree with you.

WENTWORTH (*not vouchsafing an answer*). Winifred, you will come with me.

JULIA. I wouldn't hurry her if I were you.

WENTWORTH. I am not hurrying her.

JULIA. No, only ordering her to come at once.

WENTWORTH. I am proud to say that my wife has absolute liberty of action. She will tell you so herself.

JULIA. I should call that the last proof of submissiveness.

AGNES. Hush, Julia, you aren't helping matters. Wentworth, I don't see why we should quarrel about these jewels when nobody wants them—at least no one but yourself. And I do think that Mrs. Mordaunt would enjoy her liberty a little more if—if you didn't order her about quite so much.

JULIA (*provokingly*). Oh, it's all in the family, Agnes.

WENTWORTH. Let my wife speak for herself. Winifred, I leave the decision to you. Are you or are you not mistress of your own actions?

WINIFRED (*calmly*). I am entirely free. My husband never attempts compulsion.

WENTWORTH. You say that unreservedly?

WINIFRED (*same tone*). Quite unreservedly.

WENTWORTH (*with authority*). In that case there is nothing further to detain us.

JULIA. Nothing at all—unless indeed one had a mind to stay.

WINIFRED. Wentworth, these ladies have formed the idea that you oblige me to do things that I do not wish to do.

WENTWORTH. That is part of their impertinence.

WINIFRED. Precisely. I should like to correct their impertinence.

WENTWORTH. I do not altogether understand you.

WINIFRED. I wish to convince them of their mistake. I think we both wish that.

WENTWORTH. Certainly.

WINIFRED. Since I am free to do as I like, I will stay here a few minutes after you go. I have a word to say to these ladies.

WENTWORTH (*shocked at the proposal*). My dear,— (*He is about to refuse when his eye falls upon the ironically watchful look of Agnes and of Julia. He becomes defensively suave.*) Do quite as you like, Winifred. Shall I wait for you downstairs in the motor?

WINIFRED. Better go home. I have a taxi waiting. (*Wentworth's eye, as he turns to go, falls upon the emeralds. He hesitates; then, advancing to the table, he lays his hand upon them.*)

WENTWORTH (*glancing with covert defiance at Agnes and Julia*). These at least I shall take with me.

WINIFRED (*low, but emphatic*). I think, Wentworth, you should leave those jewels where they are.

WENTWORTH. My dear, you do not understand the purposes of these women.

WINIFRED. Suppose I do not understand. I think you should leave *my* jewels where they are.

WENTWORTH. Yours to keep, not to throw away.

WINIFRED (*in a still lower and still more emphatic key*). I think you should leave them, Wentworth. I *quite* think so. (*She fairly capitalizes the "quite" without raising her voice.*)

WENTWORTH. On that point you must permit me to judge for myself, my dear. (*He takes up the jewels.*) I will wait for you at the house. (*He salutes Julia and Agnes with the same elaborately slighting bow with which he entered. He is close to the entrance door when Winifred again speaks.*)

WINIFRED. Wentworth!

WENTWORTH. Well?

WINIFRED. I quite think that you should leave the jewels. (*Wentworth makes a gesture compounded of deference and impatience, and disappears. The three women look at each other.*)

AGNES (*very kindly, to Winifred*). You wanted to speak to us?

WINIFRED. No. (*Pause.*) It's all clear, isn't it? (*Another pause.*) I think I wanted—a cup of tea.

AGNES. Certainly. Julia, is there more hot water? (*Julia goes out at further door left and almost instantly returns with hot water.*)

WINIFRED. I do need tea. And I think I should like to drink it in an easier chair. This one looks very cosy. You don't mind? (*She takes the seat known as the "quicksand" while Agnes makes the tea.*) And—somehow I'm very hard to please this afternoon—I want my tea in a particularly pretty cup. Could I have that one with the silver fern and the blue hummingbird? Oh, thank you!

CURTAIN

THE LAST MEETING

CHARACTERS

THE DOCTOR
THE WOMAN
THE YOUNG SOLDIER

Scene: a section of a ward in a military hospital in France in 1917. *Wall of room at back. A cot in which the young soldier is lying occupies the back centre, its foot toward the audience. Table and chair to right of cot; edge of second cot just visible at the left. The Doctor, a strong-faced man of thirty-five, sits in the chair, holding the patient's wrist. The patient is a young man of twenty-three, very pale, with clear eyes that look trustfully at the Doctor.*

THE DOCTOR (*approvingly*). First-rate.

THE SOLDIER. I may see her then, Doctor?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. But no nonsense, no emotions, you understand?

THE SOLDIER. Yes, yes. Will she come soon?

THE DOCTOR (*taking out his watch*). The two-thirty-five is due—overdue by three minutes. It's ten minutes' ride from the station to the hospital.

THE SOLDIER (*his eyes alight*). In fifteen minutes, then—

THE DOCTOR. If the train isn't late, and if Miss Copeland doesn't go to a hotel first.

THE SOLDIER. Miss Copeland?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. Isn't that her name? It was the name signed to the telegram.

THE SOLDIER. Yes, yes, Miss Copeland. (*He has the effect of memorizing the name.*)

THE DOCTOR (*glancing curiously at him*). I believe the boy doesn't know the name of his own fiancée. (*The young man smiles apologetically.*)

THE SOLDIER. Doctor, I should like to tell you something.

THE DOCTOR. Certainly—only be sure that you want to.

THE SOLDIER. I'm quite sure. Doctor—Copeland isn't her name. And—she isn't—my fiancée.

THE DOCTOR (*with some brusqueness*). What in—(*he changes the word*) Heaven's name is she, then?

THE SOLDIER (*with effort*). She's—a married woman.

THE DOCTOR (*with a keen glance*). You're young for that sort of thing.

THE SOLDIER. You see it was after my first wound—the one in the groin. They sent us to the west of England. She opened her house to us; she was kind, helped the nurses, and so—well, it just came. They're simpler than a man thinks—that sort of thing.

THE DOCTOR (*drily*). I take your word for it. (*A pause.*) Where was the husband?

THE SOLDIER (*reluctantly*). Away. At the war. It was that that hurt.

THE DOCTOR. His being at the war?

THE SOLDIER. Yes. It seemed like—stabbing in the back. Don't you think so?

THE DOCTOR (*half pityingly, half contemptuously*). One might see it that way certainly.

THE SOLDIER (*after a pause, timidly*). Doctor?

THE DOCTOR (*professionally kind again*). Well?

THE SOLDIER. Doctor—are you—married?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. (*He instantly repents of the curtness of his tone, and makes amends by an unwonted explicitness.*) I have a very good wife whom I expect to visit in a few days. I haven't seen her for two years. It's a long time.

THE SOLDIER. For the woman, you mean?

THE DOCTOR. No. I meant for the man. (*The Soldier ponders this.*)

THE SOLDIER. You do care, then? He didn't.

THE DOCTOR. Who didn't?

THE SOLDIER. Her husband.

THE DOCTOR (*controlling his irritation at the parallel*). My dear boy!

THE SOLDIER (*pleadingly*). I know, Doctor, but—you see I wanted to ask you—

THE DOCTOR. What?

THE SOLDIER. If a man had served you as I served him—you know who—would you call him a skunk?

THE DOCTOR (*cheerfully*). I think I would kill him first, and then let him call himself what names he liked.

THE SOLDIER. Yes, the names a fellow calls himself—that's the trouble. (*A pause.*) You'd kill him?

THE DOCTOR. I should want to.

THE SOLDIER. That's what I worry about.

THE DOCTOR. Being killed?

THE SOLDIER. Not being there to be killed. I don't like dying in this way. It's skulking. He should have a chance at me.

THE DOCTOR (*resolving to be light*). Get well, then, and give the man his chance. (*The Soldier smiles wanly, but not uncheerfully.*)

THE SOLDIER. What is it, Doctor? (*An orderly has just given the Doctor a note.*)

THE DOCTOR. Miss Copeland (*he speaks the name with a slight, hesitating disgust*) is in the waiting-room. Will you see her now?

THE SOLDIER. Yes. Am I—am I—very white, Doctor?

THE DOCTOR (*smiling*). Pretty well. Not quite rosy, you know.

THE SOLDIER. I shouldn't want to seem ghastly to her.

THE DOCTOR. No, no. (*A woman is seen approaching from*

the right; the Doctor rises.) When you've spoken to her, I shall want to say just a word to her—about not exciting you or letting you talk too much. Then you can be alone. (*He rises, goes to the left of the bed, turning his back, to permit them to greet each other undisturbed. The Woman, who is slender and rather tall, is draped in a long traveling-cloak, and her face is deeply veiled. A certain distinction in her carriage and bearing penetrates both these disguises, and reveals a social rank slightly superior to that of the young soldier. Of the embarrassment inseparable from the occasion she betrays very little; she approaches the bed, kneels, throws a long shapely arm around the young man's head upon the pillow. Neither is superficially excited.*)

THE WOMAN. My dear—my dear.

THE SOLDIER (*at first inaudibly, then with a clearing voice*). Evelyn. You've come so far for me?

THE WOMAN. Not for you—for myself; all for myself.

THE SOLDIER. I didn't ask it, you know.

THE WOMAN. Your letter didn't, but you did. Anyhow I should have come.

THE SOLDIER. Am I much changed?

THE WOMAN. Not so much. Thin perhaps, yes, and pale. I never saw you really well, you know. (*During these last speeches the Doctor has turned round and noiselessly approached the left side of the bed, unobserved by either speaker. He looks for some seconds with lively but passionless curiosity at the little of the woman that can be guessed from her veiled face and stooping figure. There is a very clearly marked instant when this calm look changes to passionate and startled scrutiny.*)

THE SOLDIER. Your face, dear—your face. (*There is a pause. Then the Woman, quite unaware of the nearness of the Doctor, raises her face, and lifts the veil. The Doctor looks, and his face the next instant resembles nothing so much as the*

path of a tornado. His hand drops to the bedside. Something in the strong professional associations of that familiar object restores his self-possession. His face becomes iron.)

THE SOLDIER (*his eye on the Woman*). It's the same face, Evelyn—quite unchanged.

THE WOMAN (*simply*). I kept it for you.

THE SOLDIER (*whom the fall of the Doctor's hand upon the bed has apprised of his presence*). Evelyn, I want you to meet the Doctor—Doctor James. (*The Woman, instinctively rising to her feet, is carried by the movement so far toward the head of the bed that her face, when it turns to meet the Doctor, is concealed from the Young Soldier. There passes across the face the look that foretells a shriek, but the shriek does not reach the lips. The Doctor, also, has moved backward on the other side. As his eyes meet the Woman's, with two incredibly swift movements which seem but the two halves of a single gesture, he points his hand warningly toward the patient on the bed, and raises it again with a movement that imposes silence. Either the force of the man masters the Woman, or serves as challenge to some kindred faculty of self-control in her. There has been no break in the silence when the Doctor says formally in a voice of which the self-command is nearly perfect:*)

THE DOCTOR. How do you do—Miss Copeland?

THE WOMAN (*mechanically*). How do you do?

THE SOLDIER (*affectionately*). He's a very good doctor, Evelyn.

THE WOMAN (*passively*). Yes, dear—very good.

THE DOCTOR (*who has been busy with the usual tests*). You have helped him already, Madam. You are a good nurse.

THE WOMAN (*same tone*). I am glad.

THE DOCTOR. I leave you with him now. But he is very weak. He must not talk too much, and he must be told nothing that will excite him, nothing whatever—do you understand?

(He looks pointedly at her, and the Soldier notices, unsuspiciously, but with a slight surprise, the intentness of their mutual gaze.)

THE WOMAN (*calmly*). Perfectly. I shall be careful.

THE DOCTOR. I leave you together, then. (*He goes off right.*)

THE WOMAN (*her eyes still on the Doctor*). What did you say his name was—Doctor James?

THE SOLDIER. Yes.

THE WOMAN. Is that his last name?

THE SOLDIER. I don't know. I suppose so. They all call him that. (*During the dialogue that follows the Woman's mood varies between a passionate preoccupation which seems almost to forget the Soldier and a tender, atoning eagerness which sets no bounds to its caresses.*)

THE WOMAN. You didn't write to me about him, dear.

THE SOLDIER. He's been here only ten days. Don't you like him, Evelyn?

THE WOMAN. Very much. But he's hard, I think.

THE SOLDIER (*surprised*). He's been very good to me.

THE WOMAN. That isn't goodness. That's just treatment.

THE SOLDIER (*curiously*). You speak almost as if you knew him. You might have, you know. He lives in the west of England.

THE WOMAN. Does he?

THE SOLDIER. I thought perhaps that when—(*he pauses*) when things are—settled here, you know, he might take you home. He's going home—in a few days—to his wife.

THE WOMAN (*hastily*). No, no, dear, we couldn't ask that. Besides, he'll change his mind.

THE SOLDIER (*perplexed again*). Why do you say that, Evelyn?

THE WOMAN. Oh, I don't know. He's a doctor, you see. Doctors don't care much for their wives.

THE SOLDIER. He cares.

THE WOMAN (*a trifle too eagerly*). Did he say so?

THE SOLDIER. Almost.

THE WOMAN. Tell me what he said.

THE SOLDIER. He said two years was a long time for husband and wife to be apart, and when I asked: "Do you mean for the woman?" he said he meant for the man.

THE WOMAN. Yes, they miss us—after two years.

THE SOLDIER. I think he'd look after you, but of course— It's odd we should talk so much about him, isn't it?

THE WOMAN. Very odd, dear.

THE SOLDIER. I want to talk about something else, though.

THE WOMAN. Well?

THE SOLDIER. Your husband.

THE WOMAN. No, no, not about him; that'll excite you.

THE SOLDIER. It's thinking that excites me. Evelyn, I took you from him; there's not much left for me; I sometimes wish I could give you back to him.

THE WOMAN. You mean you're sorry?

THE SOLDIER. He was a soldier—like me. That cuts a little.

THE WOMAN (*almost with a forlorn smile*). You want to bequeath me to him. He doesn't want me as a legacy.

THE SOLDIER. Couldn't you love him, Evelyn?

THE WOMAN (*with decision*). It's too late now. He knows.

THE SOLDIER. He knows.

THE WOMAN. Yes.

THE SOLDIER. About me?

THE WOMAN. About us.

THE SOLDIER. When did he find out?

THE WOMAN. Very lately.

THE SOLDIER. This journey, you mean?

THE WOMAN. Don't ask me any more, dear, I shouldn't have told you what I did. Don't talk any more, or the Doctor will call me a bad nurse.

THE SOLDIER. I wish I could see him.

THE WOMAN. The Doctor?

THE SOLDIER. No, your husband.

THE WOMAN. You couldn't speak to him about it.

THE SOLDIER. I think I could—here—now.

THE WOMAN. My poor boy!

THE SOLDIER. I think if he could see me—could see us—he might understand and forgive.

THE WOMAN. My dear, men never forgive. They never forgive because they always understand.

THE SOLDIER. All the same—

THE WOMAN. Hush, the Doctor's coming.

THE DOCTOR (*at right*). I am sorry to disturb you—Miss Copeland. (*He stresses the name a little, as if to enjoin the maintenance of the part. Then he speaks to the Soldier.*) Are you better?

THE SOLDIER. Much better, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR (*applying the thermometer*). Fine. You owe a debt to—your friend. Drink this, will you? (*The Soldier drinks the contents of a small glass which the Doctor holds to his lips.*) Now try to sleep.

THE SOLDIER (*already drowsy*). She may stay?

THE DOCTOR (*soothingly*). She shall stay. (*The soldier's lids close.*)

THE WOMAN (*intent on every movement*). An opiate?

THE DOCTOR (*with a glance of approbation for this strictly medical topic*). A very small one. The wound has to be dressed. (*He loosens the patient's clothing. The Woman removes her cloak, tosses it on the chair, and watches fixedly the Doctor's movements. The sleeve of the Soldier's nightgown, which the Doctor is drawing from the arm, becomes caught at the lower end at a moment when the physician's hands are both occupied. The Woman by a noiseless skilful movement releases the sleeve.*)

THE DOCTOR (*gravely*). Thank you. (*He looses the bandage and bares the wound. Then he glances at the Woman. She has neither averted her eyes nor faltered. After a moment's reflection he speaks.*) You see where the wound is—

in the chest just below the shoulder-joint. I want some one to hold the arm out of the way—so. If I lay it on the bed, it drags and teases the patient. You had steady nerves and a firm hand once. We are short of nurses. Do you think you could hold that arm?

THE WOMAN (*firmly*). I can. (*She takes the arm.*)

THE DOCTOR. That is right. A very little higher. Quite right. You have lost nothing.

THE WOMAN (*quietly*). I have had practice lately. (*They have spoken thus far, and continue to speak in whispers. The conversation which follows is interrupted continually by the claims of the work, and the Doctor's glances at the Woman are occasional and brief.*)

THE WOMAN (*after a rather long silence*). Can you save him?

THE DOCTOR. "Save" is a large word. I have some hope.

THE WOMAN (*tensely*). And will you?

THE DOCTOR. Certainly, if I can.

THE WOMAN. You know what he is?

THE DOCTOR. Perfectly. He's my job.

THE WOMAN. You don't hate him?

THE DOCTOR. Time enough to hate him when he's safe.

THE WOMAN (*after a long, tense pause*). You are great. I said you were great—always. But you are stone.

THE DOCTOR. I wish I were.

THE WOMAN. You mean— What is it? The syringe? Here.

THE DOCTOR. Thanks. (*Short pause.*) You were saying—

THE WOMAN. You are not a man—not even a husband.

THE DOCTOR. Everything in its turn. I'm a doctor now. The husband can wait.

THE WOMAN (*with quiet meaning*). I thought it was the wife that waited.

THE DOCTOR (*letting his glance rest for a second upon her in its passage to the face of the young man*). She didn't wait

long. (*Brusquely, as the Woman starts.*) Mind what you are doing.

THE WOMAN (*with a sudden meekness*). I will be careful.

THE DOCTOR (*kindly*). That is right.

THE WOMAN. Is the wound bad?

THE DOCTOR. The wound is healing. It's the lung that's dangerous.

THE WOMAN (*looking at the sleeper*). He is very young to die. (*The note of detachment in her sincere pity momentarily arrests the Doctor.*)

THE DOCTOR. Do you—love—this lad? (*He pronounces the word "love" gingerly, as if it were the name of a toothpaste.*)

THE WOMAN. Yes.

THE DOCTOR (*with a swift, short glance*). Is he worth it?

THE WOMAN. I haven't put a price upon him.

THE DOCTOR. I mean no offense. He's a good, plucky boy—

THE WOMAN (*acridly*). Thank you.

THE DOCTOR (*ignoring her sarcasm*). But is there enough of him?

THE WOMAN. Enough to leave you for?

THE DOCTOR. Put it so, if you like.

THE WOMAN (*after a pause*). You can judge. (*Pause again.*) I had all there was of him, you know.

THE DOCTOR. That's the point. You can't have quite all of a man that is anybody.

THE WOMAN (*bitterly*). How much had I of you?

THE DOCTOR. You're sure you know how much?

THE WOMAN (*who can not repress a movement and a slight cry*). Ah!

THE DOCTOR (*sharp again*). Remember what you're doing. You will hold that arm steadily, and you will not raise your voice—do you understand? A shock might kill him.

THE WOMAN. Why don't you get some one else?

THE DOCTOR. Because you can do it, and the nurses are all busy.

THE WOMAN (*firmly*). Very well—for his sake.

THE DOCTOR. For his sake of course. I may save him for you.

THE WOMAN (*bitterly quiet*). For me?

THE DOCTOR (*easily*). I suppose so.

THE WOMAN (*same tone*). I believe it is the devil that teaches you what to say. I shan't move—don't be afraid—I'm not excited.

THE DOCTOR. What have I said?

THE WOMAN. Nothing. It's what you imply—for him and me. He is a dog who has licked your chop while your back was turned, and you fling the chop at him.

THE DOCTOR (*interested, but non-committal*). I'm too busy for metaphors just now.

THE WOMAN. No—don't forget your patient.

THE DOCTOR (*actually pausing in his work for the first time*). My patient? Is that what he is to you?

THE WOMAN (*remorsefully*). No, no, I forgot.

THE DOCTOR. Don't you want me to save him? (*At the mere idea he instinctively resumes his work.*)

THE WOMAN (*brokenly, while her eyes study the sleeping man*). I—don't—think—I know.

THE DOCTOR (*still busy*). You aren't sure you want him, then?

THE WOMAN. I want him—yes. But—do you think I could ever take him back from you?

THE DOCTOR. That is for you to say.

THE WOMAN (*with low but increasing vehemence*). Oh, I love him, and I hate you—hate you, as I believe, with just cause; but you're so much the larger man that—that—when you're by he isn't there. Here he is, poor boy, dying under my hands, and for the last half hour I've thought of nothing but you. That is what I will never forgive you, James Carrington—never. (*Her voice rises on the last words, perhaps her hand trembles a little. At all events the Soldier opens his eyes with the look of one who searches his memory for straying fragments. The first thing that he sees is the Doc-*

tor's hand laid peremptorily upon the Woman's mouth; the next is the expression of forced composure on both faces as their eyes meet his, and the hand is too impulsively withdrawn. Other mists than those of sleep disperse themselves in the Soldier's clearing mind, and his face is traversed by the same convulsion which discovery had wrought in the Doctor and the Woman. The look lasts but a moment; it is followed by unconsciousness. The Doctor is instantly at his side, applying restoratives to the lips and nostrils. The Woman comes to his aid, divining the objects of his search, and forestalling the hand that gestures toward the row of bottles on the table. At length the Doctor pauses, looking at the Soldier's face.)

THE DOCTOR. He is coming back.

THE WOMAN. For long? (*The Doctor shakes his head.*)

THE DOCTOR. He should see you, not me, when he wakes. (*He retires to the other side of the bed, and stands near the head where he is practically invisible to the patient.*)

THE SOLDIER (*opening his eyes*). Evelyn.

THE WOMAN. Yes, dear. (*She has knelt once more at his side, and is bringing her lips close to his, when a dim protest in his face arrests her.*)

THE SOLDIER. Not now, not now—don't you remember?

THE WOMAN. Do you think I care?

THE SOLDIER. It can't be—now.

THE WOMAN. As you please, dear.

THE SOLDIER. Where is he?

THE WOMAN. Don't think about him. He is nothing to us. (*The Soldier broods over this.*)

THE SOLDIER. You know I wanted to see him.

THE WOMAN. The Doctor?

THE SOLDIER. The other one, wasn't it?—the husband. I wanted to tell him about me and you. (*The Woman looks for an instant at the Doctor. He comes forward within sight of the patient. The Woman rises to her feet.*)

THE DOCTOR (*professionally kind*). How are you?

THE SOLDIER (*after searching the Doctor's face*). Forgive me. (*The Doctor without hesitation lays his hand gently on the young man's. Again the Soldier explores his face.*) Doctor?

THE DOCTOR. Yes?

THE SOLDIER. Forgive her. (*His eyes turned toward the Woman. A long silence. The Doctor visibly hesitates. The look he turns upon the young man is almost stern, but its sternness is, as it were, encountered and turned back by the distress in the Young Soldier's face. That distress reaches a point where it becomes irresistible to the physician. The Doctor, without even glancing at the woman, extends his hand to her across the bed. There is a pause. The Soldier fixes his eyes upon the Woman. There is a curious dignity and repose in the gesture with which she accepts the Doctor's offered hand.*)

THE SOLDIER. Thank you. (*The Doctor's quick eye, which has never left the patient's face, is instantly aware of the imminence of a decisive change. He is at the other side of the bed in a moment. He looks, listens attentively, feels the pulse. Then he rises and faces the Woman.*)

THE DOCTOR (*quietly*). There is nothing to be done.

THE WOMAN (*glancing toward the body, but facing the Doctor*). This is my work.

THE DOCTOR. Mine, too. I should have stopped you sooner. (*A pause. He politely offers to retire, leaving her alone with the body.*) The place is yours now.

THE WOMAN. Ours, you mean. (*She reaches out a hand, which, after an instant's scrutiny, he clasps. They look toward the bed. The dead face on which their looks converge is touched with confidence and peace.*)

CURTAIN

THE RIM OF THE DESERT

CHARACTERS

CHARLES MAURIAC, *lieutenant in the French army*
RAOUL D'AULNAY, *lieutenant in the French army*
SENTINEL
MADAME D'AULNAY, *mother of Raoul, not speaking*
GROOM, *not speaking*

Scene: Algiers towards the Sahara. *Time:* our own day.

The curtain rises on the level, sandy, open space around a French limestone fort on the margin of the Sahara. One corner of the fort with a dark vaulted entrance at the angle of the meeting walls fills the upper right-hand section of the stage. To the right and far to the rear in the diagonally opposite corner of the fort is another entrance, hardly visible at this hour to spectators, but indicated by a light over the archway which brightens as the glow forsakes the west. Behind and about the fort stretches the vast and tranquil desert naked and white beneath a slowly dimming orange sky. Most of the stage is bare, but the lower corners of the scene, right and left, are furnished with benches of dark stone with massive, curving backs. Before the visible arch stands an armed sentinel. At the left a groom leads a horse up and down at right angles to the footlights, and the sound of the hoofs, waxing or waning with the distance, forms a steady and subdued accompaniment to the action of the play. Charles Mauriac is seated on the stone bench at the right, and two riders, a man and a woman, have checked their horses, a few feet from their point of entrance at stage left.

The sentinel rises as Raoul d'Aulnay, dismounting, crosses the stage on foot to the arched entrance. The woman, who still keeps the saddle, is no longer young, but the hands that grasp the bridle firmly are delicately shaped, and her whole posture in the act of waiting

is of a high tranquillity and proud erectness. Mauriac watches the arrival with interest.

RAOUL (*after an exchange of salutes with the sentinel*). I am told that the body of Captain Frédérique Dujardin is awaiting burial in this fort to-night.

SENTINEL. It is true, Monsieur.

RAOUL (*taking a paper from his pocket*). I bring an order from the Under-Secretary of War allowing the lady whom you see to view the body.

SENTINEL (*after examining the paper carefully*). The lady may enter.

RAOUL. The place is lonely. You will permit her escort to enter with her doubtless.

SENTINEL (*very politely*). I regret to disoblige Monsieur. His name is not in the permit. (*Indicating Mauriac.*) I was obliged to disappoint the other gentleman.

RAOUL (*following the sentinel's gesture vaguely*). The other gentleman? I do not understand you, sentinel. It is impossible that two persons can have sought this lonely spot to-night on the same unusual errand.

SENTINEL. I do not permit myself to contradict Monsieur. Otherwise I should have ventured to tell him that another visitor is with the corpse of Captain Frédérique Dujardin at this moment in the chapel.

RAOUL (*confounded*). A woman?

SENTINEL. No, a man.

RAOUL (*collecting himself*). In that case we will wait till he retires.

SENTINEL. Very good. (*Brief pause.*) If I might presume to make a suggestion to Monsieur—

RAOUL. Certainly.

SENTINEL. Madame might have reasons for haste. At eight the body of Captain Dujardin will be lowered into the vault. At ten minutes after eight it will be sealed in the crypt.

There remains only a half-hour. We have no means of knowing how long this visitor may remain in the chapel.

RAOUL (*after some thought*). This lady is a Parisian—of rank. To leave her alone with a dead body and an unknown third person is—is scarcely possible. Could you give me the name of this visitor?

SENTINEL (*shaking his head*). I am deeply sorry. My orders are precise. (*He observes Raoul's distress with sympathy.*) This young man (*he points to Mauriac*) is the companion of the visitor. He is bound by no orders.

RAOUL. Thank you, sentinel. (*He moves toward Mauriac, who rises. The two young officers salute, then study each other's faces with a look in which recognition succeeds perplexity.*) M. Mauriac. We—we are hardly strangers.

CHARLES (*courteously*). Not strangers certainly, M. d'Aulnay. Either less or—more.

RAOUL (*after a pause*). M. Mauriac, whatever our past relations may have been, you are a gentleman, and at this moment I am in pressing need of a small service. I understand that a companion of yours is now with the corpse of Captain Frédérique Dujardin in the chapel of this fort. Could you give me his name, or—if that be too much—could you assure me that he is of a rank and character which make it safe for my—kinswoman (*he indicates the woman on the horse*) to enter the chapel unprotected?

CHARLES (*after a thoughtful interval*). M. d'Aulnay, I think I should be frank with you. The man in question is commander of the Tenth Army Corps now stationed in the Vosges. He is a major-general. He is François Mauriac. Incidentally, I am his son. (*Smiling.*) I do not list that among his guarantees.

RAOUL. *I* do. I thank you, M. Mauriac. You have rendered me a service that I shall always gratefully remember. (*He turns away with a salutation.*)

CHARLES. M. d'Aulnay!

RAOUL (*turning back with admirably controlled impatience*). Monsieur!

CHARLES. Has it occurred to you that it might be no more than just that these securities should be—mutual?

RAOUL (*recovering from an instant's perplexity*). Mutual? Ah, I see. Pardon me for forgetting that a major-general of France might need securities from a woman.

CHARLES (*with a fine self-command*). M. d'Aulnay, is your irony just? My father's person may be secure. But a woman asks to share his privacy—his privacy with the dead. Is his son wrong in wishing to assure himself that the visitor will not abuse the privilege?

RAOUL (*with engaging youthful candor*). I was wrong, Monseiur, and I ask your pardon. Will it end your doubts if I tell you that the visitor is my mother, Madame d'Aulnay? (*Charles bows profoundly with an assenting gesture and retires. Raoul crosses stage to Madame d'Aulnay, with whom he converses in brief but vivid dumb show. At her son's first words, a look of surprise, of recoil, of something not far from anguish, contracts the lady's face, but her self-mastery is so complete that she has regained at least the semblance of composure before the shock in which her own emotion is reflected has vanished from the features of her son. She listens almost absently to the young man's explanations, while her eyes sweep in a wide circuit around the dim and featureless horizon, dispatching a keen incidental glance like a javelin in the direction of Charles Mauriac. At last, with a word to her son, she sets her horse in motion toward the archway with a look that seems almost to dominate the inevitable by the disdainful and imperious finality of its surrender. Her son, following her on foot to the gate, seems to deprecate her entrance, but a single slight curve of the elastic wrist, neither angry nor overbearing, but conclusive, puts an end to his expostulations. The door is opened by the sentinel, and the mounted figure vanishes into the inner dusk. Raoul, turn-*

ing back with a reluctant and melancholy step, is brought face to face with the problem created by the neighborhood of Charles Mauriac. Both young men feel that they are in a situation where they can neither seek nor shun each other without implying either a greater intimacy or a deeper estrangement than the facts of their relation justify.)

CHARLES (*seeking shelter in the matter-of-fact*). You have a good horse there, and he is wet from a hard journey.

RAOUL (*with his habitual suavity*). He will cool presently.

CHARLES (*with authority*). He will cool too fast. The drop in temperature at this hour in Algiers is swift, and a fine animal is often seriously hurt by the sudden chill. Light exercise is the best remedy. (*Slight pause.*) My groom can lead two horses as easily as one.

RAOUL (*unable to resist the spell of human friendliness in this lonely district*). I shall be greatly obliged. (*Charles signals to the groom, who, from this time on, leads both horses up and down on the left-hand margin of the stage.*)

CHARLES (*watching Raoul's horse*). He will take no harm now.

RAOUL (*looking about him*). Do you know what that light is over there?

CHARLES. That is over the other gate,—the gate that opens on the desert.

RAOUL. The desert is a grim thing, isn't it? It waits out there—it crouches—like a devil.

CHARLES. I am no poet. My father feels those things. He said to-day that the desert is a place into which a man would be glad to carry a great love or a great despair.

RAOUL. That doesn't sound like a soldier's remark.

CHARLES. My father is a soldier—and more.

RAOUL. And more? (*He reflects.*) Yes, of course. Otherwise— (*He looks toward the fort and abruptly changes the topic.*) Your regiment is not in Algiers, M. Mauriac?

CHARLES. No, I am in the Vosges with my father.

RAOUL. I am in Alsace. (*A pause.*) This is a long way, I should think, from the Vosges.

CHARLES (*with a keen glance*). Is it nearer to Alsace?

RAOUL (*with his winning frankness*). Does that mean that I have been impertinent?

CHARLES (*with civility*). Not at all.

RAOUL. May we sit down while I try to apologize? You smoke, Monsieur? (*They sit on the stone bench left. Charles, declining the cigar which Raoul offers, lights a pipe. Raoul lights the cigar.*) There is still another question in my mind—if I may wipe out one indiscretion by another.

CHARLES. By all means.

RAOUL. You are a relative of Captain Dujardin?

CHARLES. No. He was a protégé of my father's. My father paid his way through the military school—with what funds, his own or another's, I do not know. And you?

RAOUL. Captain Dujardin was a fourth cousin of my mother's. I never met him.

CHARLES. I met him only once.

RAOUL (*after a pause*). General Mauriac takes, I infer, a great interest in his protégés.

CHARLES (*with a nod*). And Madame d'Aulnay in her fourth cousins.

RAOUL. You reprove me again, and justly. Let me say in my own defense, Monsieur, that I know nothing of my mother's reasons for this journey. That made me curious, I suppose, about your father's.

CHARLES. M. d'Aulnay, our position justifies an unusual frankness. I know nothing of my father's motives for this journey. You are surprised. But anyone close to my father would understand why even a son does not tease him with unnecessary questions.

RAOUL. I understand, I think. (*Slight pause.*) Madame d'Aulnay has never formed the habit of explanations with her

children. I should be wrong not to add that she is an excellent mother.

CHARLES. Each of us faces a mystery which, taken by itself, is quite insoluble. (*He drops his voice.*) Has it occurred to you that the two mysteries, if laid side by side, explain each other?

RAOUL (*after a pause, and trembling*). M. Mauriac, I hope I do not grasp—or that you do not grasp—the implications of your words.

CHARLES (*looking firmly at Raoul*). I mean what you think I mean, but I mean no disrespect to you or anybody.

RAOUL (*with suppressed passion*). You dare to put into words what I have—forbidden myself to think?

CHARLES. What are the things that a man forbids himself to think? They are the things, are they not, that he is already thinking?

RAOUL. If you had said this to me in Paris— (*He glances at his sword-hilt.*)

CHARLES. The desert can hear things that Paris cannot. At Maxim's this would have been an insult. But here! Up yonder in the chapel there is a man and a woman—man and woman, mark you—beside the dead body of a French captain twenty-five years younger perhaps than either. What does it mean? Don't you want to know? *I* want to know. Are you and I forbid to think of it? Among these sands, under this sky, are you and I forbid to think of it together? (*Raoul looks at him with a terrified enthralment.*)

RAOUL. We are almost strangers.

CHARLES. At the military school we seemed on the way to friendship.

RAOUL. A friendship abruptly broken off—

CHARLES. Not by me.

RAOUL (*almost pleadingly*). By my act, it is true; not by my will. Even so, we scarcely know each other now.

CHARLES. Our situations are identical.

RAOUL. No, no, surely they are very different. A man is his mother's son as he can never be his father's. What is this thing, even if true, even if *known,* to General Mauriac? But to my mother—

CHARLES. Our common knowledge, our *concert,* might be her protection.

RAOUL (*impressed*). What do you want me to do?

CHARLES. I propose that we try to find out why those three people are in that chapel—now—together.

RAOUL. Two of them are our parents.

CHARLES. And the third—what is he?

RAOUL (*answering this question only by a long look at Charles*). In your company, Monsieur, I find myself capable of many unusual things. I am at your service.

CHARLES. What do you know of Captain Dujardin?

RAOUL. I know what the newspapers said—nothing more.

CHARLES. That is about all I know, but I have verified some of the reports in the newspapers. Let us see if our memories agree. Captain Dujardin, in a drunken brawl about a year ago, killed a fellow-officer. He did this, not with a sword or pistol, but with a burning log snatched from the fireplace which left the head of the victim not only crushed but charred.

RAOUL. I remember.

CHARLES. For this outrage he was condemned to twelve years' imprisonment.

RAOUL. A term afterwards shortened to eight.

CHARLES (*looking meaningly at Raoul*). Through intercessions doubtless which the newspapers were careful not to report. Very well. After six months in prison Captain Dujardin escaped by a ladder of cords dropped from a second-story window.

RAOUL. Yes.

CHARLES. Then comes, as you remember, the remarkable part of the story. Captain Dujardin, having escaped, did not flee.

RAOUL (*with a certain repressed enthusiasm*). He came back to his regiment.

CHARLES (*also repressing his sympathy*). At midnight, in his convict dress—

RAOUL. Summoned his former comrades to arms—

CHARLES. And led them—

RAOUL. In defiance of the orders of their colonel—

CHARLES. To the capture of a Moorish post which had resisted for five months the assaults of the French army.

RAOUL. Captain Dujardin was brought back to camp, victorious—

CHARLES. But mortally wounded. He died within three hours of his return to the camp.

RAOUL. He had a desperate and fiery character.

CHARLES (*after a pause*). A character that would have strongly appealed to General Mauriac. I do not venture to add "to Madame d'Aulnay."

RAOUL (*quietly, after a pause*). I will add "to Madame d'Aulnay."

CHARLES. It appealed to all France doubtless, (*he pauses significantly*) but all France is not watching in that chapel tonight.

RAOUL (*in a low voice*). But in a case so extraordinary—

CHARLES. People do not leave their hearths or their desks to hunt up all that is extraordinary. The extraordinary is too common. (*Pause.*) Did you ever see my father, M. d'Aulnay?

RAOUL. Only once—as a lad in a country house which my mother and I were visiting. I looked out of the window of our sitting-room, and I said: "Mother, who is that man upon the lawn?" She looked out and said—quietly enough—after a moment's pause: "That is General Mauriac."

CHARLES. And you saw him the next morning?

RAOUL. No. A telegram came that night summoning my mother back to Paris.

CHARLES. That very night?

RAOUL. Yes. We went away at half-past seven the next morning.

CHARLES. You have no reason to think that Madame d'Aulnay disliked our family?

RAOUL (*slightly hesitating*). I cannot quite say that.

CHARLES. Will you tell me why you cannot say it?

RAOUL. M. Mauriac, we spoke a moment ago of our early friendship at the military school and of its sudden ending through my act.

CHARLES. Yes.

RAOUL. In that act I obeyed, not my own wish, but my mother's.

CHARLES (*musingly*). I never saw Madame d'Aulnay till this evening. At that time I was a boy of fourteen.

RAOUL. She did not name her objection, M. Mauriac; but I am sure that it had nothing to do with your character or record.

CHARLES (*looking at Raoul*). There remains my family.

RAOUL (*after a pause*). I see nothing else.

CHARLES. Another fact that I recall may be significant. Some years ago my father was offered the portfolio of war in one of M. Briand's cabinets.

RAOUL. I think I remember.

CHARLES. He declined the offer, because, as he once told me, membership in the cabinet would involve social relations with a person on whose society it was impossible for him to force himself.

RAOUL. He gave no name?

CHARLES (*smiling*). You do not know my father. This was in March—or April—1919. Your family had no part in the French cabinet in the spring of that year?

RAOUL (*pondering*). In the spring of 1919? That was the time, I think—I am sure—when my father held for two months the post of minister of education. (*The two young men are silent for some seconds.*)

CHARLES. We have gone so far that a further step, however delicate, is unavoidable. Your father and mother—

RAOUL. Their relations were cordial.

CHARLES. Cordial? (*He meditates; then in answer to Raoul's look of inquiry.*) Quite right, M. d'Aulnay. The word for an instant struck me as unusual. My own parents live, so far as a son can judge, in perfect harmony. Possibly my father's relations with his family have a flavor of episode. One of my uncles once told him in jest that, when he took his family on a journey, he had to resist an impulse to check them with the other baggage.

RAOUL. That was not my father's way. Mother often had to stop his games with us.

CHARLES. Your mother did not share in the games?

RAOUL. Mother? (*Recollecting himself.*) I forget you never saw her till to-night.

CHARLES. Your mother disapproved of games?

RAOUL. No. She simply never included them among the possibilities for herself.

CHARLES. If you will forgive one more question, is Madame d'Aulnay religious?

RAOUL (*considering*). She was faithful. I should hardly call her devout.

CHARLES. Not austere, then?

RAOUL. No. I remember but one habit of hers that anyone could call austere. (*He checks himself.*) Does this bear on our object?

CHARLES. It might.

RAOUL. Once every year my mother spent twenty-four hours in the house of the Carmelites in the Rue d'Angoulême, Paris.

CHARLES. That was not extraordinary.

RAOUL. Not in itself. It had an emphasis for the family because it always came on the same day. Afterwards we learned something. One of the nuns told my sister that our

mother spent the night in vigil prostrated before the altar. It was not like our mother to do that, and the fact impressed us.

CHARLES (*musingly*). That recalls something to me—something in my father's life.

RAOUL. Something like it?

CHARLES. Like it perhaps in being an exceptional private anniversary, but very unlike it in other ways. This was a kind of celebration.

RAOUL (*with diminished interest*). Ah!

CHARLES. My father had a study in a tower on one of his country estates. If he were on that estate when a certain night in the year came round, he always filled the study with red and white roses, lighted the candles, and opened the windows. The roses up there among the stars and candles affected us children very powerfully. But he would never tell us what it meant.

RAOUL. Was it talked about?

CHARLES. A little. In a man without oddities it was noticeable.

RAOUL. I see no relation between the two facts. My mother's vigil, if it meant anything more than general piety, must have recalled some painful event. What your father remembered was evidently cheerful.

CHARLES. I believe you are right. At the same time—

RAOUL. Well?

CHARLES. The same act, M. d'Aulnay, might have two sides, a side of guilt and a side of joy, and might lead to two opposite commemorations.

RAOUL. That is rather speculative, is it not?

CHARLES (*candidly*). Very much so. I thank you for recalling me to common sense. (*He pauses in the act of relinquishing the idea.*) If the idea were worth testing, there would be a very easy test.

RAOUL. What test?

CHARLES. The dates.

RAOUL. I do not understand you.

CHARLES. If these two observances related to the same fact, it is nearly certain that the dates would agree.

RAOUL. Ah!

CHARLES. There is not one chance in a thousand that the two dates are the same. But if they should agree,—let us be plain with ourselves and each other—we shall have reached a point from which there is no turning back. You can face the worst?

RAOUL (*mastering a brief dismay*). I am a soldier, M. Mauriac.

CHARLES. Very well. The seventeenth of June was the date on which my father filled the study in the tower with roses.

RAOUL (*slowly*). The seventeenth of June was the night which my mother spent in vigil at the house of the Carmelites. (*The two young men look long and fixedly into each other's eyes. Then, as by a common impulse, both rise to their feet.*)

CHARLES (*not without a fine humanity*). I am sorry, M. d'Aulnay.

RAOUL (*sincerely*). Thank you.

CHARLES (*with a gesture*). They have shunned each other for twenty-five years and they are there—*together.*

RAOUL (*in a whisper*). Will they *say* anything?

CHARLES. I do not know. (*Pause.*) The *living* face that each sees must be more terrible and ghostlike than the dead. (*They are pacing slowly toward the right.*)

RAOUL. And when they come out—

CHARLES (*understandingly*). Yes. What can they come back to? After *this?* (*They pause at right of stage.*)

RAOUL (*taking out his watch*). What time have you?

CHARLES (*taking out his*). A quarter past eight.

RAOUL. I have the same. They should be here shortly.

CHARLES. They should be here now.

RAOUL. I wonder—if we shall know them—when they come out. (*Pause.*)

CHARLES. There is still much that I do not understand. Why after all should they shun each other?

RAOUL. Isn't it plain enough?

CHARLES. Do you call it plain? Granted an hour of passion, of surrender—what does that mean in our French society? I am a young man, but in Parisian drawing-rooms I have seen persons with vivid common memories meet each other with civility, with ease; I have heard them gossip and jest with one another. Forgetfulness in drawing-rooms is easy.

RAOUL. Perhaps *they*—hated each other.

CHARLES. I cannot think that—somehow. But if they did, are hatreds so unsociable in Paris?

RAOUL (*hesitatingly*). There might be another reason.

CHARLES (*very gravely*). What?

RAOUL. Suppose they dared not meet each other—because they had never ceased to love. (*The silence with which Charles receives this is profoundly affirmative. Pause.*)

CHARLES (*thinking aloud*). Each had a strong will controlling strong passions, and each saw in the other the memory of the single moment when the passions rose up and overwhelmed the will.

RAOUL. And this Dujardin, this heroic madman—

CHARLES. Was the child of that fiery instant.

RAOUL. And each loved the other in him. And what each wanted perhaps in this last look at him—

CHARLES. Was a last look at the other.

RAOUL. They have had that look. (*Feeling that no more is to be said, both turn their steps toward the sentinel.*)

CHARLES (*to the sentinel*). It is twenty minutes after eight. We may expect our friends at once?

SENTINEL (*who has risen at their approach*). They should be here already.

CHARLES. Already?

SENTINEL. They will not be admitted to the vault. At eight o'clock they should have been excluded from the chapel.

RAOUL. That is twenty minutes ago. (*The sentinel bows respectfully. The two lieutenants look at each other with anxiety.*)

SENTINEL (*seeing their disquiet*). It is possible that the visitors have left the fort by the other exit.

CHARLES. Where we see the light?

SENTINEL. Yes.

CHARLES. But that exit leads to the desert.

SENTINEL. Yes, Monsieur. But they might return to this side from the further exit.

CHARLES. I do not understand that.

SENTINEL. They are mounted, and in the dusk it is easier to find one's way around the fort than through it.

CHARLES (*to Raoul*). You have good eyes, Monsieur?

RAOUL. People call them so. But at this distance and in this dusk I can see little but the light over the gate.

SENTINEL (*offering glass*). My glass might be useful to Monsieur.

RAOUL. Thank you. (*He looks through the glass.*) There are two figures on horseback just outside the gate.

CHARLES. In motion?

RAOUL. Not yet. (*Pause.*) One of them is my mother.

CHARLES. And the other?

RAOUL. I do not know. I saw General Mauriac only once when I was very young. (*He passes the glass to Charles.*)

CHARLES. It is he.

RAOUL. They have not moved yet?

CHARLES. No. (*Then sharply, as he thrusts the glass into Raoul's hand.*) Look!

RAOUL. They are off—at a gallop—into the— (*He turns a white face toward Charles.*)

CHARLES (*breathlessly*). Let the sentinel look. He knows the routes. (*Raoul hands the glass to the sentinel.*)

RAOUL. You see the man and woman on horseback? Where does that road lead to?

SENTINEL. Into the desert.

RAOUL. Only into the desert? Nowhere else?

SENTINEL. No, Monsieur.

RAOUL (*quiveringly, to Charles*). They have gone into the waste—into the night—with each other.

CHARLES (*tensely*). They could not part. They could not be together. So—

RAOUL. There was nothing else.

CHARLES (*recovering his energy*). Quick! To our horses! (*They turn their faces to the left, as Charles signals to the groom.*) We can reach them? Your horse is better than your mother's?

RAOUL. Yes. And yours?

CHARLES. My father owns the better animal, but at this moment his is not so good as mine. It has carried a much heavier weight through a hard journey.

RAOUL. Good. We must lose no time. (*The groom has brought up the horses. The young men are preparing to mount; each has his hand on his own bridle.*)

CHARLES. None,—*if we want to go.*

RAOUL (*sternly*). Monsieur, every second is precious. We have not one to spare to jest—or to vileness.

CHARLES. M. d'Aulnay, tell me one thing. You were not upon the point of asking me the question that I just now asked you?

RAOUL (*hotly*). No. (*He tries to meet the eyes of Charles, but his own drop.*) Or—if I had a base or frantic moment—

CHARLES (*pointing to the desert*). *Their* choice is the desert.

RAOUL. The desert means death. We are their sons.

CHARLES. They are our parents. Shall we bring them back like cattle-thieves—or cattle?

RAOUL. They must be saved some way.

CHARLES. They have chosen that way. (*He points again to the desert.*)

RAOUL. In their frenzy.

CHARLES. Or their wisdom.

RAOUL. M. Mauriac, I am a simple French officer. Be great in your own way. Let me be decent in mine.

CHARLES (*reflecting*). You may be right. I, too, love order and decency, trodden ways and the approval of my kind. Only—only—they are powerful souls, and they have willed their common death. But you are right doubtless. Europe at least is with you. Put your foot in the stirrup and I follow. (*Raoul turns as to obey, then again faces Charles.*)

RAOUL (*almost inarticulate*). It is wicked. It is impossible. But—

CHARLES (*almost tenderly*). But—?

RAOUL. It has to be. (*The two young men clasp hands, and look into the desert.*)

CHARLES. We shall go back alone.

RAOUL. This would be madness in Paris.

CHARLES. The desert has its own sanity.

RAOUL (*looking intently at Charles*). When we get back to France, what then?

CHARLES. We must not repent. If one of us meets the other, he will look into that other's eyes as if to say "Have you repented?", and if the eyes say "Yes" the first man will go mad.

RAOUL. The whole world would be against us. We must hold to each other.

CHARLES. The whole world—except two.

RAOUL. Do you mean ourselves?

CHARLES. No, I meant the two out there. They will understand us.

RAOUL (*diviningly*). They will thank us that we dared to let them die.

CURTAIN

THE BLOOM ON THE GRAPE

CHARACTERS

ANDRÉ DE CAVAIGNAC, *French painter, thirty-two years old.*

BEATRICE DE CAVAIGNAC, *his wife, physical director for women in Bromfield University, New York City; twenty-eight years old.*

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC, *mother to André, who has lived in England, and taught herself and her son the language.*

The scene is the Algerian coast in our own time.

The curtain rises on the tentlike summer painting-room of André de Cavaignac. Ceiling and walls of white cloth with dark vertical stripes through the slits and rifts in which sunbeams enter to streak or spot the white-tiled floor with brightness. Entrances at the right and left front; a window-like opening in the rear shows yellow desert under blue sky receding toward a veiled horizon. Easel upstage on the right; near the left-hand wall small fountain in a tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl basin, its pale pure jet soothingly visible in the heat and lullingly audible in the silences. Animal pelts, white or black, serve as rugs. White-covered couches and reclining chairs; two wicker-chairs. All is white, black, or wood-color, except for the splendid barbaric scarlet of a Moorish flag disposed with its staff against the cloth wall in the right-hand corner. The effect is tranquilly delicate and salubrious; it would even be cool were the place not Algiers in July.

Beatrice de Cavaignac faces the audience at the front centre as the curtain rises. She is beautiful in the pointedly Saxon style, with clear blue eyes and golden hair, a flush on her cheeks, and an almost

athletic combination of suppleness and strength in the finely poised and sculpturesquely patterned frame. The physical balance finds its counterpart in a mental poise, a frank, goodhumored comradeship with life, which is held in momentary abeyance by the fervor of the opening speeches. The passion in both the woman and the man must be rendered with that form of restrained ardor which suggests that the restraint is rather epicurean than puritanic. Beatrice, erect and unmoving, waits with the look of one expectant of a joy profound enough to make even expectation a delight. André de Cavaignac enters left and comes toward his wife. They stand eye to eye, without touch or speech for a period long enough to plunge an ordinary married couple into agonies of embarrassment. At length André draws his wife toward him with a slow, delaying, appropriating movement which ends in the finality of an embrace. Then, releasing her, he puts a little space between them and peruses her face with an exacting eye; drawing nearer, he touches the hair, the cheek, with a delicately eager hand.

CAVAIGNAC (*in a low, rapturously brooding tone*). Unchanged —unchanged.

BEATRICE (*with an archness that cannot hide intensity*). Am I all there?

CAVAIGNAC. Dearest! No, don't kiss me yet. Kisses are for the blind. Let me *look* at you.

BEATRICE. I've *wanted* you, André.

CAVAIGNAC (*clasping her again*). Wife!

BEATRICE. André!

CAVAIGNAC (*humorously chiding*). I said "Wife."

BEATRICE (*smiling*). Husband, then.

CAVAIGNAC. Ah, you Saxon girl! Time hasn't pared one curve.

BEATRICE. Time doesn't *pare* the curves. I wish he did.

CAVAIGNAC (*not heeding her*). You are like the dawn—austere even in splendor. It is like the rosiness of a nun.

BEATRICE (*escaping*). You shall not call me a nun. *You!*

CAVAIGNAC. Come back. I will call you—what shall I call you?

BEATRICE (*returning*). Call me a Bacchante who has found—

CAVAIGNAC. Well?

BEATRICE (*head lifted and eyes upon him*). Dionysus!

CAVAIGNAC. Dionysus, yes. The bloom has never left our grapes.

BEATRICE (*touching his cheek a little critically*). A trifle too much bloom, dear.

CAVAIGNAC (*declining this cue*). Ah, the hand! I think my cheek has dreamt of that hand.

BEATRICE (*whispering*). Not of the lips?

CAVAIGNAC. The lips are priceless. But it has dreamt of the hand.

BEATRICE. Has the hand dreamt of your cheek? I'm afraid not. It has been a very busy hand—in America.

CAVAIGNAC. America,—that sty. (*He says this incidentally, without malice.*)

BEATRICE. *I* was born there.

CAVAIGNAC. That was a sad inadvertence.

BEATRICE. For that you shall kiss me no more. No more for five minutes. Sit down. (*They seat themselves on a couch facing the audience, which for the first time has a front view of Cavaignac's strongly marked and interesting features. He looks slightly older than his thirty-two years, and his face, though French and handsome, is less regular than the typically handsome face of the French pattern. What fixes the attention and remains in the memory is the deep-set, passionate eyes in which a fire burns that might alternately or even at the same time find its fuel in art, in sensuality, or in religion. When he is not eager, he is melancholy, and through all this intricacy of potential ardors runs a quick, analytical, satirical intelligence which at bottom is more distrustful of itself than of any of the enthusiasms it exposes. It is part of his French training to be adept in the delicate sneer no less than in the polite lie; both are parts of manner, and neither strikes inward. At bottom, he is rather simple, and the observer feels*

that he might pass as suddenly from the skeptical to the child-like as from the debauch to the fast.)

CAVAIGNAC. You did not bring the boy?

BEATRICE (*smiling maternally*). No, he's at a farm on the Hudson, making himself fat with new-laid eggs and country cream and raspberries.

CAVAIGNAC. I remember the Hudson.

BEATRICE. Not on the farms, I think.

CAVAIGNAC. No, I never saw it in its virginity. (*Pause.*) Is he like me?

BEATRICE. The boy? No. (*Then she inspects him to verify her word.*)

CAVAIGNAC. I shall forgive him if he is the more like you.

BEATRICE. Yes, he's like me—rosy and jolly and ordinary,—he's *very* like me.

CAVAIGNAC. You never bring him with you.

BEATRICE (*thoughtfully*). No, I don't. Do you know, much as I love him, he never seems to be part—

CAVAIGNAC. Of what?

BEATRICE (*looking at him, still thoughtfully*). Of our relation.

CAVAIGNAC (*with his half fervid, half abstracted melancholy*). To me he is its soul.

BEATRICE. That is odd.

CAVAIGNAC. The child puts the soul into marriage. It turns the bower—into a shrine.

BEATRICE. I wonder if I want the shrine. (*In a lower key.*) The bower's enough—isn't it? (*Her hand is on his sleeve with a touch that is a promise and a prayer.*)

CAVAIGNAC (*rapturous again*). Do you ask me that?

BEATRICE. I can't see the boy here,—somehow. Besides, he's too young to get good from the trip.

CAVAIGNAC. Were you all alone, then?

BEATRICE. Oh, no. I came with some friends, Mrs. Chesney

and her brother, Mr. Evandale,—faculty people. They're out there in the *Ecuador* now. (*She points right.*)

CAVAIGNAC. They aren't coming here?

BEATRICE (*laughing*). Poor André. No, no. They're going for a cruise in the Levant. The *Ecuador* sails at eight to-night. It takes in coal here.

CAVAIGNAC. Are they—bearable?

BEATRICE. Certainly. They are very intelligent and very kind. Americans, unfortunately.

CAVAIGNAC (*with his mechanical irony*). The misfortune is widespread.

BEATRICE. They invited me to come back and cruise with them if I didn't find you. I'm not sure they really think I have a husband.

CAVAIGNAC. Am I so mysterious?

BEATRICE. They can't understand—Mr. Evandale, in particular.

CAVAIGNAC (*suavely*). He is very kind to try. Just what is it that this—Evandale—can't understand?

BEATRICE (*smiling*). My relation to you.

CAVAIGNAC (*still suavely*). Has he never heard of marriage?

BEATRICE (*laughing*). Yes, it survives even in New York. Do you know, the oddest thing happened a few months ago. We have a new dean of women at Bromfield, very straitlaced, and very inquisitive about me, and about you, too naturally. There was a M. de Beauséjour who visited Bromfield last winter, and when he went back to Paris, this dean, Mrs. Goldthwaite, actually asked him to go to the American embassy in Paris, and find out if we had really been married there six years ago.

CAVAIGNAC (*in his impalpable way*). He was satisfied?

BEATRICE. *She* was.

CAVAIGNAC (*picking up a dropped thread*). Beauséjour, did you say?

BEATRICE. Yes.

CAVAIGNAC. He's an acquaintance of my mother's.

BEATRICE (*astonished*). He is?

CAVAIGNAC. My mother's acquaintance is a drove. But the other man, this—this Evandale, did he ask you about us?

BEATRICE. Yes, the other day at lunch he asked me point-blank what you and I were going to do in Algiers in July, and I said I didn't know, and, when he looked at me in polite dismay, I told him I could only refer him to the "Ode to Psyche."

CAVAIGNAC (*vaguely*). "Ode to Psyche"?

BEATRICE (*humorously reproachful*). Keats?

CAVAIGNAC. I remember. He was that one of you who had no soul himself, but every one of his senses had a soul.

BEATRICE (*approvingly*). Yes, you remember. Well, Mr. Evandale evidently read the "Ode to Psyche" between lunch and dinner-time, and at dinner he spoke to me only once, and that was to ask if I would have a little more salt on the pistachio nuts.

CAVAIGNAC. Canaille!

BEATRICE. The next morning he had slept off his disapproval, and he walked with me for two hours on the deck.

CAVAIGNAC. Why are we hard to understand, Beatrice?

BEATRICE. You see, André, it would all be plain if we lived apart for eleven months of the year, and then lived together in society, in a capital, for a month, to hide the estrangement. But they can't see why you and I should live apart for eleven months, and then for one month, apart from all the world, together. They can't grasp the idea that we are luxuries to each other.

CAVAIGNAC. Unfortunates!

BEATRICE. And of course we can never tell them—we can't explain. That first trial of ours—that hateful winter in New York—it was hateful, wasn't it dear?

CAVAIGNAC. It was unspeakable.

BEATRICE. You hunted out all the dissipations, André.

CAVAIGNAC. They hunted me out. They scented me. I'm a beast, you know. (*He says this in the same tone in which he would say "I am a Frenchman" or "I am thirty-two years old."*)

BEATRICE. Yes, André. (*The American in her insists on smiling very faintly as she says this, but the woman does not smile at all.*)

CAVAIGNAC. That winter was a fact—in natural history.

BEATRICE (*smiling ruefully*). My first course—and I didn't like the subject.

CAVAIGNAC. And the next winter—with me in Buda-Pesth—that was not so much better.

BEATRICE (*trying to be amused*). Not so much. We hadn't found out yet.

CAVAIGNAC. What?

BEATRICE (*tenderly reproachful*). Don't you know?

CAVAIGNAC (*with subdued passion*). Never mind what I know. Say it to me.

BEATRICE (*very low*). That I could live a month in every year with you—and you a month in every year with me—in perfect joy; and that—

CAVAIGNAC (*ardently*). Yes?

BEATRICE (*same tone*). *You* shall say that.

CAVAIGNAC (*very low and slow*). And that we mustn't—ask—for any more. (*He takes her in his arms.*)

BEATRICE (*yielding herself*). It is very well with us, dear—very well indeed.

CAVAIGNAC. Other people have twelve months.

BEATRICE (*with her quick American rebound from sentiment*). Nonsense! They haven't one. (*She has gently disengaged herself.*)

CAVAIGNAC. They cannot even understand.

BEATRICE. To me it's all so clear. There's a part of me that blends with a part of you, André, like—like sky and water.

And the rest of me simply doesn't know the rest of you. I'm an American working-girl—mostly. I like the people; I like their plain, blunt, friendly ways; I like my work; I like teaching the girls athletics in Bromfield University. I like the very routine; I don't mind even the commonplace. But there's always the month ahead, the month with you. In some bright spot—I say the names over as I lie awake at night—Venice and Luxor and Hawaii and now Algiers. Algiers—the name is sorcery.

CAVIAGNAC. How should they understand? Stupidity is their occupation.

BEATRICE. Perhaps they aren't so stupid. I don't want to judge the mean world meanly, but really I sometimes think that everything in marriage that is stale and spiteful and disillusioned comes peering at our windows and snuffing at our doors. They can't bear that our marriage should be a joy and they call it dissipation.

CAVAIGNAC. We are indecently happy. That is unforgivable.

BEATRICE. You are happy, then? (*She rises and walks upstage toward the opening.*) It is beautiful here. You like it, don't you?

CAVAIGNAC. It is a miracle. (*He joins her at the opening.*) It is the colors. They wake me at night like birds. I cannot sleep for that yellow and the blue.

BEATRICE. Ah, you are to sleep at night—to sleep eight hours, do you hear? I will not have these serenading colors.

CAVAIGNAC. Have it your own way. You are mistress here. (*They return downstage.*) Do you like the place?

BEATRICE (*walking about*). Very much. Really, André, it's very hard upon a woman, being the wife of an artist. She can't even reconstruct the furniture. Where did you get that flag?

CAVAIGNAC. That's a flag that a Biscayan rover captured from the Moors. His daughter sold it to me for a cask of Château-Margaux.

BEATRICE. Is that how you get things?

CAVAIGNAC. I have to get them by exchange. I have no money. (*He has led her to a wicker-chair left, and has placed himself on a wolfskin at her feet, his hands clasped before his knees.*)

BEATRICE (*concerned*). You are poor?

CAVAIGNAC. I am thriftless, my dear, and a little lazy. That discourages the Jews.

BEATRICE (*after a moment's thought*). I was sorry to send only four hundred dollars when you cabled. I could spare no more. The rents in New York are frantic.

CAVAIGNAC (*hiding his face in the hand which he kisses*). My dear! The apologies of the wronged, they are the great retaliations. (*He almost fancies that this humility is repayment.*)

BEATRICE. There is something that perhaps you should be told, André. They may cut down my salary.

CAVAIGNAC (*abstractedly*). They are dreary things,—salaries.

BEATRICE. In America we think them rather cheerful. But I wanted to tell you. You're listening?

CAVAIGNAC (*studying her eyelashes*). Devoutly.

BEATRICE. Bromfield is poor, and they think some of the salaries are swollen. They've been reducing them.

CAVAIGNAC. Well?

BEATRICE. The trustees talked of reducing mine. They didn't do it. Mr. Evandale is intimate with one of the trustees. I think he prevented that.

CAVAIGNAC (*with his casual melancholy*). I begin to like your Evandale. Don't these people want you?

BEATRICE. Yes, they want me. The girls are fond of me, and I know my trade. But they reduce where they can, and, though they think I'm efficient—I *am* efficient—they think it would be hard for me to get another place.

CAVAIGNAC. Why?

BEATRICE. I'm under a cloud.

CAVAIGNAC. What cloud?

BEATRICE (*smilingly putting her hand upon his hair*). This cloud.

CAVAIGNAC. You mean this marriage—this inexplicable marriage?

BEATRICE. Yes. Let me tell you another thing. There was some talk last year of my going to a university in Iowa, and the president, who saw me in New York, wanted to know if I should mind changing my name to Mrs. Kavanaugh or Mrs. Cavendish.

CAVAIGNAC. Why?

BEATRICE. They don't like me as Madame de Cavaignac.

CAVAIGNAC. They object to Mesdames?

BEATRICE. Not quite that. They have Madames and Signoras, plenty of them, in our faculties. But they don't like a Madame with yellow hair and blue eyes. She doesn't look the part. She looks the other part. It's like a Lutheran before a crucifix.

CAVAIGNAC (*reflecting*). Well, if you want to change your name,—

BEATRICE (*almost bitingly*). My name is yours, André.

CAVAIGNAC (*pleadingly*). Forgive me. It is a refulgent name —since you took it.

BEATRICE (*relentingly, as she rises*). It's all right, dear. Let them think what they will. What are they to us? Only, if they should cut down my salary, I couldn't help so much with —Monte Carlo.

CAVAIGNAC (*who has also risen*). Ah, how little I deserve you, —I, who am a straw in the wind, tossed between a sunset and a flagon, between a canvas and a woman's breast.

BEATRICE (*her hand on his shoulder*). Do not think of it, André. I knew everything when we made our pact. I expected the gaming and the drink. As for the—the natural history, I don't suppose you've been spotless, but somehow I feel that you've been essentially faithful. The heart has

stayed with me. No, don't speak. Assurances in these matters are ridiculous; one is surer without them. Come, we've threshed out all our troubles now. We can be happy.

CAVAIGNAC (*with slight embarrassment*). There is just one little trouble more.

BEATRICE. What is that?

CAVAIGNAC (*hesitating a little*). My mother.

BEATRICE (*inquiringly*). Your mother?

CAVAIGNAC. She is here.

BEATRICE (*dismayed*). Here,—with you and me?

CAVAIGNAC. Do not be alarmed. I have procured her departure.

BEATRICE. Not turned her out, I hope?

CAVAIGNAC. Virtually.

BEATRICE (*divided between shock and relief*). Really, André!

CAVAIGNAC. I had to buy her departure. I hope the price will not distress you.

BEATRICE. What price?

CAVAIGNAC. I consented that she should see you. On those terms she agreed to leave the place at six o'clock.

BEATRICE (*mastering an impulse to laugh.*) Well, André, I have never met your mother, and, since she is in the house, I think it only (*she hesitates for the word*) daughterly that I should see her, especially as she makes a point of seeing me. I think it hard that she should be driven from the house on my account, though, frankly, I'm too selfish to urge her to stay.

CAVAIGNAC. She will not trouble you long, dearest. Of course you will not listen to her.

BEATRICE. Not listen to her?

CAVAIGNAC. She has some idiotic plan. I have not listened to her. That is why she wants to talk to you.

BEATRICE (*decisively*). Then I shall listen to her. Go and tell your mother that I shall be very happy to see her at once.

CAVAIGNAC (*pressing her hand*). It is a foolish necessity. Mothers are—inevitable. (*He goes out right. Beatrice, left alone, wanders to the little fountain, and dips her finger in the jet. Presently a woman enters from the right. She is sixty years old, slender for her years, grey-haired, unimpeachably gowned, self-contained, courteous, and impassive. She advances toward Beatrice, holding out two delicately gloved hands. Beatrice impulsively extends one hand, then, on a second impulse, draws it back.*)

BEATRICE. My finger—wet. How stupid of me! (*She hastily dries the finger on a handkerchief, and holds out her hand to Madame de Cavaignac. The Frenchwoman's program has been a little deranged by this episode, but she proceeds to reconstruct it with mathematical precision. Beatrice is obliged to take both her hands and to undergo the imprint of a deliberately formal kiss on either cheek. Madame de Cavaignac is then ready for conversation.*)

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Receive my humblest apologies. I have been shamefully slow in making the acquaintance of my son's wife.

BEATRICE (*imitating, but at the same time Americanizing, the old lady's formality*). Please don't apologize. You see I've been equally slow in making the acquaintance of my husband's mother.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You are most kind. I did not let André come back with me. When two women wish to talk seriously, a man is—is an irrelevance.

BEATRICE. André is never an irrelevance to me. I see so little of him that he is always to the point.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. I am very glad to hear you say so, for it is of André that I wish to speak. (*Short pause.*) Will you forgive an old woman for begging your permission to sit down?

BEATRICE. Am I hostess? I suppose I am. I am sorry to begin the part by apologizing for an incivility. Do sit down.

(*Madame de Cavaignac sits at one end of the front centre couch; Beatrice takes an armchair at the right.*)

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*scanning Beatrice*). You are a beautiful woman. My son has not exaggerated.

BEATRICE. I am much obliged to both of you.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. I have been most anxious to talk to you. I am sure I speak to one who is deeply concerned in the—the advancement of André's happiness.

BEATRICE. You speak to André's wife, Madame.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Precisely. Your marriage has been in some points (*she looks narrowly at Beatrice*)—in many points—all that a mother could desire.

BEATRICE. We are glad to have satisfied our relatives.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. In many respects. But there is one point in which André's prospects need—looking into, and some of his friends have formed a plan which I have undertaken to present to you.

BEATRICE. I beg your pardon, but has this plan been presented to André?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Unfortunately, no. The plan—pardon my candor—involves you, and on plans that involve you I regret to say that André is unapproachable.

BEATRICE. It seems to me that I should be equally unapproachable on plans that involve André.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. There is a difference. André refuses out of generosity toward you. You will listen—if you will be so gracious—out of consideration for him.

BEATRICE. I see. The plan requires a sacrifice from me.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*cautiously*). It might be so viewed.

BEATRICE. Madame de Cavaignac, if you know of any way in which André can be really helped by a sacrifice on my part, by all means tell me frankly what it is.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You are most encouraging. André, my dear young lady, lives beyond his means. He lives regu-

larly—increasingly—beyond his means. He is not luxurious, but—he wastes money.

BEATRICE. Madame, André's mother and his wife may surely speak plainly with each other. André plays heavily—practically all the time—and he loses heavily—most of the time.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. I thank you for your candor. Let us speak openly. André makes no secret of the fact. He has imparted the information to practically all his friends—his friends with incomes, that is to say.

BEATRICE. That is quite probable.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You have an income, I believe?

BEATRICE (*indignant*). Madame!

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*hastily raising a deprecatory hand*). I glance at the point merely. We feel that André in this difficult situation ought to put all his resources to use.

BEATRICE (*still smarting from the last speech but one*). What resources?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*admiringly*). Ah, there you reach the point at once. André has for instance an attractive person. You agree with me?

BEATRICE. Certainly.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC.—We think that person might be made—advantageous.

BEATRICE. Advantageous!

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. To his income.

BEATRICE. I really don't understand you. He couldn't be a model, could he?—he's a painter. Or do you want him to go on the stage?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. No, no. Nothing of the kind. There is another method. He might attract a rich girl.

BEATRICE. No doubt.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. He might marry—that is, remarry, if an arrangement just and agreeable to all parties could be devised.

BEATRICE (*rising*). Madame, are you aware that you are speaking to M. de Cavaignac's wife?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*imperturbably*). Sit down, please. I believe that I am speaking to a person who has a deep interest in my son's welfare. So at least that person has assured me. Let me entreat you to sit down.

BEATRICE (*sitting down*). Go on by all means. Whom is he to marry?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Perhaps you know that André has two uncles on the father's side who have means—directors in an insurance company. (*Beatrice faintly assents.*) They opposed the American marriage, the marriage with you, and since that time they have done nothing for André. They have a friend, a M. Rocroi at Marseilles, with whom André became acquainted in that town last fall. M. Rocroi has money. He has also a daughter Louise. (*Refined pause.*) She is young and impressible. (*Another refined pause.*) She was impressed by André.

BEATRICE (*leaning forward a little*). Is she beautiful?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*resourcefully*). She is—interesting. (*The two women look at each other in the achievement and at the same time the denial of mutual understanding.*)

BEATRICE (*leaning back a little*). Ah! (*Pause.*) And André—was he drawn to her?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*prepared on this point*). Not—noticeably.

BEATRICE. He would not appreciate the interesting.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*resuming her narrative*). M. Rocroi perceived his daughter's attachment. There was a conference in which André's uncles and I took part. The uncles were anxious to obtain a French wife for André. They were anxious to oblige the Rocrois. It was agreed that, if this marriage could be arranged, M. Rocroi should give Louise a generous portion, and the uncles should obtain a consulate for André. They could live on the portion, and it was

hoped that the consul's salary would pay the gaming debts, present and—

BEATRICE (*who cannot help laughing at the "it was hoped"*). Prospective?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Quite so. Nothing remains but yourself.

BEATRICE (*perpetually amused by this dialogue*). Ah! You have thought of everything.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*delicately*). You have been—cared for.

BEATRICE. I am very much obliged.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. The drains of André on your income must have been an infinite vexation. Naturally they would cease.

BEATRICE. I had forgotten that.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Then the—the uncertainty of your position at that—that oddly named university would be ended by your separation from André.

BEATRICE. May I ask how you know about these uncertainties in my position?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. We had a friend in America last winter—M. de Beauséjour.

BEATRICE (*a light dawning*). M. de Beauséjour! He came to America on my account?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Oh, no. He had other interests in America, important interests, I assure you. Incidentally, he made a reconnoissance.

BEATRICE. I am glad it was only incidentally. I should have hated to monopolize his time.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. M. de Beauséjour also mentioned another fact. He spoke of a Mr. Evan—

BEATRICE (*mechanically furnishing the syllable*). Dale.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Perfectly right. This Mr. Evandale has—has (*she surveys Beatrice comprehensively while she searches for her word*)—anticipations.

BEATRICE. Go on, please.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. To which my son is an obstacle. M. de Beauséjour suggested that, if André were removed, Mr. Evandale might be—accommodated. You see how everything fits in. The completeness is—is delicious.

BEATRICE. But André—you say he is unapproachable?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*never at a loss*). You will approach him.

BEATRICE. And my rights in André?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. After all, you have André for only one month in the year. It seems a pity for one month to keep him from usefully relating himself to another woman for the whole year.

BEATRICE. I see. One mustn't be a dog in the manger.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*accepting Beatrice's irony in perfect faith*). Perfectly just. A dog in the manger.

BEATRICE. Madame de Cavaignac, you have forgotten one thing in this deliciously complete arrangement. André and I worship each other.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*deprecatingly*). Worship?

BEATRICE. Yes. I'm a grown woman. I don't scatter that word broadcast like peanut-shells on the sidewalk. I mean —*he* means—just that.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*feeling her way*). But don't you think that worship between—between *married people* is rather—

BEATRICE (*impetuously*). Speak out. I am anxious to know. *What* is it?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*cautiously*). Shall we say "unbridled"?

BEATRICE. Unbridled? Does a horse need a bridle in his own pasture? But never mind. You have my answer. André and I are worth far more to each other than anything or anybody that we could get by separation.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*undauntedly playing her last card*).

We had thought of that, too—(*in answer to Beatrice's look of inquiry*) of your unwillingness to part. (*She pauses to choose her words.*) Don't you think that the purpose for which you and André seek each other's company might be equally well served by—

BEATRICE. By what?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. By a—looser tie?

BEATRICE (*bewildered*). A looser tie?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You ask only one month. Perhaps —eleven—might content his wife. (*As the truth breaks upon her, Beatrice half rises in uncontrollable indignation; but this feeling has not time to vent itself before it is overtaken and overwhelmed by another emotion equally uncontrollable. Against her will, and to the constraint and defeat of her indignation, she breaks into peals of laughter. On recovery she is again in her chair, and she straightens up to face Madame de Cavcignac.*)

BEATRICE. Madame, after this exhibition, I cannot expect you to believe that I am as angry with you as I really am. I assure you that I am more shocked with myself for laughing than I am with your proposition, infamous as I think it is. But I have laughed, and I cannot now rage with dignity. Let us continue to be frank. You have discussed this proposition with your friends?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Thoroughly. The girl can be relied on.

BEATRICE. The girl! You certainly have interesting conversations in France.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*waving her hand*). We have not spoken to the girl. But she is tractable and her friends are intelligent.

BEATRICE. In America the girls are not so tractable, and the friends are less—intelligent.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. This will happen in France.

BEATRICE. Very true. But I live in America. Bromfield University could not be relied on.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. To do what?

BEATRICE. To equal the girl in forbearance.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You would lose your place?

BEATRICE. Certainly.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. And this Mr. Evandale—he could not be induced—to—participate?

BEATRICE. Decidedly Mr. Evandale would not participate.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. I will be frank with you. We had considered the possibility.

BEATRICE. Doubtless.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. André's uncles are generous when they are allowed their own way. A provision might be offered.

BEATRICE. Unfortunately, I like work for its own sake, and I like to earn my bread.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*a little pathetically*). You are hard to satisfy.

BEATRICE. Give me time, Madame. You must admit that the request is unusual. In all your free French comedies, I hardly remember a wife who has been asked to become her husband's mistress.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*with a slight wave of impatience*). That is why Americans like you can do nothing—because you put things so brutally to yourselves. In France we can do anything because we have the designations.

BEATRICE. The designations? Oh, yes, I see—the euphemisms.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Besides, if, instead of André's wife, you became what you too harshly call yourself, do you think the relation would be so greatly changed in—

BEATRICE. In—?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. In essence?

BEATRICE (*white with wrath*). You mean this would make us in name what we really are?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*a little daunted, but smiling*). Is it not so?

BEATRICE (*rising suddenly with a gesture of resolve*). Madame de Cavaignac, I will present your proposition to my husband. I think it very interesting, and I shall be glad to know what he thinks of it.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*rising and coming to Beatrice at front centre*). I am glad that you approve.

BEATRICE (*rejecting Madame de Cavaignac's hand*). I don't approve. But I want to hear what he will say.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*pleadingly*). You will not prejudice him?

BEATRICE (*smiling*). I will not prejudice him. He shall hear it with an open mind.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. You are admirably generous.

BEATRICE. One thing more. You have doubtless thought of a pretext for the divorce if one should be wanted.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Oh, that will be quite easy.

BEATRICE. I was sure you had thought of it.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*with a certain mild caution*). André has had ties with a beautiful Biscayan, a woman of the people, the daughter of seafarers, smugglers, and buccaneers. She has a history. It is said that she stabbed one of her lovers at a rendezvous, and that she keeps the dagger she used on the wall of the room to which she now invites her lovers. (*Tentatively, at a slight gesture from Beatrice.*) I could tell you more.

BEATRICE (*who has listened with an effort not to be interested*). If you please, no. From the beginning, when I married André, I knew that if I were curious, I should be wretched. I have not been curious. I will not be curious now. The point is that you have the evidence.

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC. Make yourself easy. We have ap-

proached the girl; she has no reticences which cannot be dispersed by—francs.

BEATRICE. That is most convenient. (*As Madame de Cavaignac turns toward the opening right.*) Will you send André to me?

MADAME DE CAVAIGNAC (*at the opening, bowing with profound ceremony to Beatrice*). At once. (*She goes out. Beatrice stands at front centre in almost the same spot and the same attitude as at the beginning of the play, but the look of meditation and purpose in her face is very different. Cavaignac enters right and approaches Beatrice.*)

CAVAIGNAC. My dearest!

BEATRICE. No, don't kiss me, Andre. Yes, you may. Kiss me once.

CAVAIGNAC. How many is once? (*He kisses her, with intervals, three times.*)

BEATRICE. That will do. Sit down. No, not there. I will sit in the couch, and you shall sit in that chair.

CAVAIGNAC. Which chair?

BEATRICE (*pointing left*). The one that isn't movable. I want to talk to you. I want to tell you what your mother said. And I don't want interruptions. (*Cavaignac, after a little gesture of deprecation, seats himself in a large chair at front left. Beatrice seats herself at left end of couch.*)

BEATRICE. They have made a plan for you, André,—your relatives. They want to give you a consulate and a good income, and to marry you to a rich girl who is "interesting."

CAVAIGNAC (*starting*). They want to *part* us?

BEATRICE. Calm yourself. They have thought of a way not to part us.

CAVAIGNAC (*impatiently*). What way?

BEATRICE. They say that we spend one month together now. They suggest that—after you have married Mlle. Rocroi—(*she speaks with low distinctness*) we continue to spend that month together.

CAVAIGNAC (*between his teeth*). The vipers!

BEATRICE. You don't want it? Think. Be sure. Don't hurry to speak. You *don't* want it?

CAVAIGNAC (*tensely*). Do I want the thumbscrew?

BEATRICE. Tell me in plain words. Do you want it? (*She speaks with great earnestness.*)

CAVAIGNAC (*with abhorrence*). No.

BEATRICE (*steadily, after a pause*). I don't want it either.

CAVAIGNAC. Then it's over. Let it go to the pit with the other infamies. It will head the procession. (*He starts toward Beatrice.*)

BEATRICE (*arrestingly*). No, sit down. André. There is more.

CAVAIGNAC. From them?

BEATRICE. No, from me. (*He reseats himself loweringly.*) Listen, dear. If we did what they said—don't mistake me, I'm against it, I don't want it both on principle and on other grounds—but, *if* we did what they said, would—would it change the heart of our relation for you?

CAVAIGNAC. It would take out the heart.

BEATRICE (*after a pause, in a low voice, as she clasps her hands and looks straight in front of her*). It wouldn't, *for me.*

CAVAIGNAC (*a little perplexed*). Well—but since neither of us—

BEATRICE (*interrupting*). Let me go on a second more, André. You've had ties with other women?

CAVAIGNAC. With *other* women? (*The emphasis on "other" is a sort of canonization of Beatrice.*)

BEATRICE. Yes. What was the difference?

CAVAIGNAC. You are my deliverance from other women. You are the shrine.

BEATRICE. The shrine! (*An idea comes to her.*) André, could you kiss me in a church?

CAVAIGNAC. Surely. That's where the husband kisses the wife.

BEATRICE. That's where the lover doesn't kiss the mistress.

CAVAIGNAC. Well, but we—

BEATRICE (*with a certain finality*). I couldn't kiss you in a church.

CAVAIGNAC (*leaning forward with his low-voiced tenderness*). Then we'll stay where you can kiss me.

BEATRICE. I'm serious, André. This Biscayan, this seafarers' daughter—could you kiss her in a place you thought holy?

CAVAIGNAC (*who, after a short, scoffing laugh, suddenly is mindful of his relation to Beatrice, and recoils*). Ah, she told you. I have a most obliging mother. Ah, well. (*A sudden, sharp line appears in his forehead, then, quite as suddenly, is cleared away.*) What does it matter? A fool would explain to a fool. But you—you have an adorable intelligence.

BEATRICE. Yes, I have intelligence about you. Tell me one thing. Do you dream of her? (*She is quietly intent.*)

CAVAIGNAC. When I'm away from her?

BEATRICE. Yes.

CAVAIGNAC (*thinking*). Sometimes. There is the dagger on the wall. One thinks of that. (*Broodingly.*) There are three daggers. Two of them are sheathed beneath her eyelids.

BEATRICE (*with self-repression*). Ah, she haunts your imagination.

CAVAIGNAC (*still broodingly*). What would you have? When the imagination goes buccaneering, it is caught by the seed of buccaneers.

BEATRICE (*vibratingly*). Do you think of me like that?

CAVAIGNAC (*rousing himself*). You—you are different. (*He turns upon her a gaze the ardor of which it is impossible to question, but Beatrice is not comforted.*)

BEATRICE. You paint three grisettes for one Madonna, don't you, André?

CAVAIGNAC. About that. (*He pauses a moment.*) But when

I paint a Madonna, Beatrice, I do not paint her like a grisette. (*He looks straight at her.*)

BEATRICE (*touched by the implication*). I know, dear. You feel the difference. But that was not quite what I meant. I think the picture that took the first prize last year was a grisette, wasn't it?—not a Madonna?

CAVAIGNAC (*with something of his old indifferent irony*). Madonnas never take prizes now. The connoisseurs are all atheists.

BEATRICE. I do not know. Perhaps they know when your imagination has gone buccaneering and has come back with treasure in its hold. They are your adventure,—these women. But you are mine.

CAVAIGNAC (*hesitating*). Do I understand?

BEATRICE. André, can you imagine a little girl who had been brought up in a park, and had always dreamed of an hour in the wilderness and a brown-skinned beggar-boy who should take her by the hand and lead her out into the great forest? That would be rapture for the little girl.

CAVAIGNAC (*intelligent again*). The beggar-boy would have another rapture.

BEATRICE. What?

CAVAIGNAC. When the little girl took him by the hand and led him into the park with its swept walks and its laurels and its statues.

BEATRICE (*hurt*). Am I so tame as that to you?

CAVAIGNAC. Tame? Do you think the park is tame for the beggar-boy?

BEATRICE. You make me feel unbearably respectable.

CAVAIGNAC. Respectability,—that is the outlaw's romance.

BEATRICE. That is almost true, but its truth is hard. Our months together,—they've been my adventure, my revel, my outbreak, yes, my debauch—that's what she told me in effect, that dreadful woman— Oh, I beg your pardon, André.

CAVAIGNAC (*with his melancholy, casual irony*). Say it out, my dear. That is one comfort a man has in getting a wife. He hears the truth at last about his mother.

BEATRICE. I'm serious, dear. Our relation has been all this to me, and to think that for you it's been all the time a—church picnic.

CAVAIGNAC. A church picnic? I do not understand what that is.

BEATRICE (*smiling in spite of herself*). No, dear, your innocence on that side is perfect. (*With the idleness natural to some forms of distress, she goes on.*) I should like to see you at a church picnic, André.

CAVAIGNAC. I thought that was just what you said you didn't like.

BEATRICE (*at fault*). Did I say that?

CAVAIGNAC. You said you were a church picnic to me, and you didn't like it.

BEATRICE. Oh, I don't want to be the picnic myself. They are tame.

CAVAIGNAC (*leaning tensely forward*). Am I tame with you? Don't I love you like a man?

BEATRICE. Yes, dear, yes. You wouldn't love serenity and order in an ugly woman unless she were excitingly ugly. The senses come in with you—even when you're running away from them. People dine, you know, even at the church picnics.

CAVAIGNAC (*with a slight, impatient shrug*). They are tedious, your picnics.

BEATRICE (*with her episodic laugh*). Quite so, André. They are for housewives and children. (*She reflects a moment.*) I suppose that's why you want the boy with us.

CAVAIGNAC. What boy?

BEATRICE (*with the faintest lifting of the eyebrows*). Ours.

CAVAIGNAC. Oh, yes.

BEATRICE. I love the boy ten times more than you do, André

—let's be quite plain—but you want him here and I don't.

CAVAIGNAC. I should love to see him—with you.

BEATRICE. The child perfects the setting for you. He would spoil it for me. That is because our two plays are so different. Yours is—what shall we say?—"Athalie"? While *mine*—mine is "Phèdre."

CAVAIGNAC. That is not your real self.

BEATRICE. No, it's a flight from my real self. It's a liaison with irregularity. And for you, André, what is our marriage? A liaison with regularity—I suppose. (*Thoughtfully.*) But they're both liaisons.

CAVAIGNAC. Do you say what *they* say?

BEATRICE (*keenly*). They? (*She turns inquiringly to Cavaignac.*) The faculty people? Your mother? The whole tribe? (*The shock of a shattering perception brings her slowly to her feet, and she passes a deliberative hand more than once across her forehead.*) If they were right! If that was what it meant!

CAVAIGNAC (*approaching her, alarmed by the effect of his words*). I meant nothing, Beatrice.

BEATRICE (*still thinking painfully*). If they were right—*they*—the whole peering, leering crowd!

CAVAIGNAC. They are idiots.

BEATRICE. Yes, but what even the idiots see, André,—how fearfully plain that must be! The Bromfield people would hardly believe that we were married, and over here—just now—your mother shoved me back and forth like a checker on a board, like a movable, like a—

CAVAIGNAC (*pleadingly*). Do not say it.

BEATRICE. It says itself. She treated me like a paramour.

CAVAIGNAC. Ah, if she were another woman, or if God had done me the supreme kindness to make her a man—

BEATRICE. Don't be angry. Suppose they're right after all. Suppose marriage has to run side by side with the grand routes, the large interests, of life, and that it can't be what

you and I have tried to make it, a byway into a heavenly glade.

CAVAIGNAC. Do you mind *them?* I mind only you.

BEATRICE. I mind their being right.

CAVAIGNAC. They are not right. (*He kisses her.*) We are.

BEATRICE (*yielding and afterwards gently freeing herself*). It seemed so two hours ago. Perhaps we were. But I don't know, dear, I think they've beaten me—the whole crew of them, the Bromfield trustees, and Mrs. Goldthwaite, and M. de Beauséjour, and Mr. Evandale, and your mother and your uncles and the girl who can be relied on. The bloom's off the grape, André. (*She moves away three paces.*) I can't eat the grape with the bloom off.

CAVAIGNAC (*following Beatrice*). You will *leave* me?

BEATRICE (*tenderly*). What else is left?

CAVAIGNAC (*changing the emphasis*). You will leave *me?*

BEATRICE (*low-voiced, but with a gesture that is like a cry*). Ah!

CAVAIGNAC (*searching her eyes*). You know what "leave" means?

BEATRICE. I wish I didn't.

CAVAIGNAC. You will take from us our month—our last month—the month in Algiers?

BEATRICE. I must, André.

CAVAIGNAC (*turning from her to the right, then suddenly coming back*). When will you go? (*They look long into each other's eyes.*)

BEATRICE (*looking away*). The *Ecuador* sails at eight to-night.

CAVAIGNAC. You cannot look at me and say that.

BEATRICE (*looking at him this time*). The *Ecuador* sails—at eight to-night.

CAVAIGNAC. You will stay to-night. (*He is about to clasp her in his arms when she suddenly, with a sort of entreating tenderness, eludes him.*) No, dear. Let me go now. They've spoilt the month for us. We will part—and re-

member. (*She goes to him, and he takes her with as much reverence as passion into his arms.*)

CAVAIGNAC (*pierced by a thought*). You are going to that—that Evandale?

BEATRICE (*smiling at him through her tears*). I can't elude Mr. Evandale—on the *Ecuador.*

CAVAIGNAC. You go now?

BEATRICE. At once.

CAVAIGNAC. Come, then. (*He leads her to the entrance right. As they reach it, she turns, and throws herself passionately into his arms.*)

BEATRICE. Beloved!

CAVAIGNAC (*who, after passionately returning the embrace, has half released her, and then, after an instant's delay, has touched her forehead with his lips*). Wife! (*She goes out. He remains at the entrance, looking after her as the curtain falls.*)

IN THE SMALL HOURS

CHARACTERS

TWO MEN

Place and time: a bridge over a large river in a great city at 2 A.M. *The part shown is an observation-platform, a spur of the main bridge, about twenty feet square, and heavily railed on the three sides that need protection. This platform occupies the front stage; behind is a segment of the foot and carriage ways; arc-lights on the bridge and dimmer lights up the river beyond the bridge pierce the gloom of the nearer and the further background. On the top of the right-hand railing of the observation-platform sits a man looking down into the water. A second man at the left-hand railing is in the act of setting his foot on a narrow ledge about sixteen inches high which projects from the railing on its inner side. As he starts to raise the second foot, he looks around and becomes aware of his motionless companion. He starts, meditates, lowers the rising foot, hesitates, withdraws the other foot, and walks quietly toward the second man.*

FIRST MAN. What are you doing, friend?

SECOND MAN (*quietly*). What you see.

FIRST MAN. I don't see.

SECOND MAN. I'm looking at the river.

FIRST MAN. Why?

SECOND MAN. I'm wondering if it will be cold.

FIRST MAN. It's always cold—in April. I knew a man who jumped in May and swum out. It was too cold then.

SECOND MAN. If I jumped, I shouldn't swim.

FIRST MAN. What are you here for?

SECOND MAN. What is any man on a bridge-rail for at two o'clock in the morning? What are *you* here for?

FIRST MAN. For that, too.

SECOND MAN. Very well. There's room here for both of us. (*He slightly indicates the other railing.*)

FIRST MAN (*pointing to the water*). There's room there for both of us.

SECOND MAN. There's room anywhere except (*he points to the crowded city in the distance*) over there.

FIRST MAN. Good night to you, then.

SECOND MAN. Good night. (*The first man returns to the left-hand rail, and, foot after foot, regains the low ledge. A pause. The second man shifts his position and watches the first.*)

SECOND MAN (*who has left his perch and approached the other*). Are you hungry?

FIRST MAN. Not so very.

SECOND MAN. Are you hungry at all?

FIRST MAN. I had coffee and a sandwich at noon.

SECOND MAN. Any money?

FIRST MAN. Not a cent.

SECOND MAN (*not unfeelingly*). I see.

FIRST MAN. Oh, I'm not quite at the end of my string. I know a man who would lend me fifty cents—a dollar perhaps. But he hasn't much, and he has to eat, too.

SECOND MAN (*feeling in his pocket*). I have twenty-five dollars here. (*He holds out the money.*) They won't help me down there. (*He looks at the river.*)

FIRST MAN. They won't help *me* down there.

SECOND MAN. Is it so bad as that?

FIRST MAN (*briefly*). It's bad.

SECOND MAN (*replacing the money, but halting*). You're sure you want to jump?

FIRST MAN (*simply*). I'm sure.

SECOND MAN. Goodbye, then. (*He returns to his rail.*)

FIRST MAN. Goodbye. (*Another pause, after which the first man leaves his ledge and slowly crosses to his companion.*) When you reached for your money just now, comrade,—

SECOND MAN. Well?

FIRST MAN. I noticed something.

SECOND MAN. What did you notice?

FIRST MAN. You have on a dress suit.

SECOND MAN. Does that matter?

FIRST MAN. No,—only you've a good deal to lose.

SECOND MAN. I have a good deal, if you like,—what they call a good deal. I've a limousine, for instance, and a chauffeur waiting for me four blocks away.

FIRST MAN (*with meaning*). Hasn't he waited long enough?

SECOND MAN (*quietly*). He is well paid.

FIRST MAN (*after a pause*). Look here, this isn't *your* way; it's *ours;* it's *mine*—the tramp's and the outcast's way. I'm a beggar practically; I'm just out of prison. Leave the river to *us*—to *me.*

SECOND MAN. The river's everybody's.

FIRST MAN. Yes, but you're not everybody. You don't dress in everybody's clothes. The water won't help that broadcloth.

SECOND MAN. I shan't need it to-morrow.

FIRST MAN (*eyeing him keenly*). As you like. (*He turns away, then looks back.*) Watch me go first. Perhaps, then— (*He retreats to his own rail, mounts the ledge, and prepares to jump. The second man, who has followed, lays a hand on his shoulder.*)

SECOND MAN. Wait.

FIRST MAN. What now?

SECOND MAN (*imperiously*). Come down. You shall not do this.

FIRST MAN. Who will stop me?

SECOND MAN (*resolutely*). I will.

FIRST MAN (*curiously*). How?

SECOND MAN. With my arm—if I can.

FIRST MAN. Did I stop you?

SECOND MAN. No. I don't defend myself. I don't say you're wrong. I don't say I've the right to stop you. But I *will* stop you if I can.

FIRST MAN. Why?

SECOND MAN. Because I can't stand still and see a man kill himself.

FIRST MAN. So that's what it comes to. You won't let us live, you rich men—and you won't let us die.

SECOND MAN (*imperiously*). Come down, blockhead. (*The first man seats himself upon the railing with his look fixed upon the man below.*) Come down, brother. (*He speaks entreatingly. The first man looks intently into the other's face.*)

FIRST MAN (*very gently*). Loose me. I am coming down. (*He descends without taking his eyes from the second man's face.*)

SECOND MAN (*laying a fraternal hand upon the other's shoulder*). That is good. Go home now.

FIRST MAN (*shaking his head*). *We* haven't any homes.

SECOND MAN. *We* haven't either. Anyhow get away from here.

FIRST MAN. And you?

SECOND MAN. I?

FIRST MAN (*looking fixedly at the other and speaking with a kind of rough gentleness*). I stay here—brother.

SECOND MAN. You can't stop me.

FIRST MAN. I'm not so sure of that. (*He rolls up a tattered sleeve and bares the underlying muscle.*) We might fight for it.

SECOND MAN. For what?

FIRST MAN. For the right to die. The winner dies and the loser lives. What do you say?

SECOND MAN. That is folly.

FIRST MAN. I don't see it. You've as good as offered to thrash me. I've offered to thrash you. We're not so badly matched. I beat you in weight—fifteen pounds perhaps, and I'm an inch or two taller. But the years are all on your side. How old are you?

SECOND MAN. Forty-one.

FIRST MAN. And I'm fifty-three.

SECOND MAN. There's no sense in it.

FIRST MAN. It's as sensible as anything.

SECOND MAN. That is quite true. I'm ready. (*They assume the positions of boxers.*)

FIRST MAN (*stopping suddenly*). Hark! Some one is coming. (*He runs to the back, and looks up and down the bridge.*) Hush! A policeman's coming. He mustn't stop us. (*They crouch in the shadow. Faint steps are heard. They grow steadily louder till a policeman appears on the main bridge behind the platform. He pauses, looks about suspiciously, walks out a few steps upon the platform, swings his lantern casually about, observes nothing, and retires. The sound of a whistle mixes with the diminishing resonance of his steps. The two men rise.*)

SECOND MAN. It's the first time I've hid from a policeman.

FIRST MAN. I've done it a hundred times. Are you ready?

SECOND MAN (*a little impatiently*). We can't do that now.

FIRST MAN. Why not?

SECOND MAN. That was a farce, and the policeman stopped it. One can't go back to a farce.

FIRST MAN. Will you let me jump, then?

SECOND MAN. I—I don't know.

FIRST MAN. You're unreasonable. If the river's good for each of us, it's good for both. Look here. There's another platform on the other side twenty yards further up. Let me go there. Are you willing?

SECOND MAN. I think so—yes.

FIRST MAN (*encouragingly*). You won't hear the splash, you know,—if that's what you're afraid of.

SECOND MAN. There's another reason why I shan't hear the splash.

FIRST MAN. Very well. (*He turns to go, pauses a second, and looks over his shoulder.*) *Bon voyage!*

SECOND MAN. Ah! French?

FIRST MAN. One hears all languages nowadays—in the prisons. (*He waves his hand in farewell.*)

SECOND MAN. Stop a minute.

FIRST MAN. What now? Don't keep a man up—at bedtime.

SECOND MAN. You shall go, but I must know something first.

FIRST MAN. What?

SECOND MAN. I must know who you are.

FIRST MAN (*coming back a step*). Have I asked who you are?

SECOND MAN. No. Don't you want to know?

FIRST MAN. What is the good? We shan't need names down there. (*He points to the river.*)

SECOND MAN. We're not there quite yet. Who are you, man?

FIRST MAN. My name is Peter Rand.

SECOND MAN. The anarchist?

FIRST MAN. They call me that—the limousine people. And you?

SECOND MAN. My name is Philip Mansfield.

FIRST MAN. The governor of the state?

SECOND MAN (*bitterly*). They call me that.

FIRST MAN. We're enemies, then?

SECOND MAN. We were.

FIRST MAN. I'd like to look at you, Governor. Step here into the light. (*They approach an arc-lamp at the right. Each looks curiously in the other's face.*)

SECOND MAN (*almost smiling*). Well?

FIRST MAN (*with more thoughtfulness than anger*). You've made life black for me, Philip Mansfield—fine and prison and raid and black words—I suppose you know that.

SECOND MAN. You haven't made life particularly easy for me, Peter Rand.

FIRST MAN. You called me brother a while ago—I suppose you'll take that back now.

SECOND MAN. No.

FIRST MAN. You don't?

SECOND MAN. When a man calls a man "brother" at two o'clock at night upon a bridge, he doesn't take it back.

FIRST MAN. Not even—

SECOND MAN (*again almost smiling*). No, not even then.

FIRST MAN. You and I—nobody would believe it. The top and the bottom—they both get here. (*He gestures toward the river.*)

SECOND MAN. If I'm not detaining you—

FIRST MAN (*ironical*). No hurry.

SECOND MAN. Tell me what brought you to this.

FIRST MAN (*a little grimly*). *You* ought to know.

SECOND MAN. Yes, but why here, why just now? Tell me about it.

FIRST MAN. Would *you* tell *me?*

SECOND MAN. You shall know anything you choose to ask from me.

FIRST MAN. You want to know why I'm here to-night. Well, I've an empty pocket and an empty belly. That's reason enough, but it isn't my reason. I've had that reason off and on for twenty years. When I came out of prison last February—the prison your officers dragged me to—I found that I had lost the leadership of my party in this state. They'd made another man chairman—he wouldn't get out. They'd put another man at the desk in our newspaper—*he* wouldn't get out. The men I'd worked and suffered for made a cabal against me while I was locked in prison. They said I asked too much—went too far. Too far! The party moves a few inches in a decade, and they talk of going too fast. Well, the little power that I had over the few hun-

dreds of our men in this state was blood and breath to me. I could have starved for it; I couldn't starve without it. That's why I'm here. How about you?

SECOND MAN. Thank you. You shall hear my story. Part of it you know already. The partisan press in this state has no dignity and no mercy. They raked up an early scandal in my past. Your paper helped.

FIRST MAN (*gravely*). I know.

SECOND MAN. The story in substance was true. In my youth I was very poor. A boy and a girl in a sorry boardinghouse crept to each other a few times to keep warm. There was nothing especially base on my part. She left me for a good place in her home town. Of course the saintly newspapers were shocked. Somebody tied together a handful of clippings and mailed it to my wife. (*He pauses and says curiously.*) Possibly you knew the sender.

FIRST MAN (*shaking his head*). No, that wasn't me.

SECOND MAN. So much the better. My wife was ill. She was a sensitive woman. (*He stops, then adds in reply to a look of not unsympathetic question from the first man.*) She's ill no longer.

FIRST MAN. Ah!

SECOND MAN. That isn't all. I've suffered in the governorship. I've wanted power and I've had to cringe for power.

FIRST MAN (*quietly*). I, too.

SECOND MAN. I've had a long battle with selfish and corrupt politicians, and—I haven't won. When I've asked men to do good, I've found them—iron. When they've asked me to do evil, they've found me—clay. That is, lately—sometimes. This very morning I signed a reeking bill—the bill of a loathsome capitalist. To-morrow he would have come to thank me, and I should have shaken his hand with the hand that signed his bill. That is why I stopped my car

to-night four blocks from this bridge, and told my man to wait.

FIRST MAN (*who has instinctively laid a friendly hand upon the other's shoulder*). I beg your pardon.

SECOND MAN. Do you suppose I mind? It isn't governor and anarchist that are together upon this bridge to-night. It isn't even Philip Mansfield and Peter Rand. It's just two men who won't be men in a few minutes. Put your hand back if you want to.

FIRST MAN (*putting the hand back for a moment*). I must go now.

SECOND MAN. Why should you go? Can't we jump together —now?

FIRST MAN (*simply*). I should like that very much. (*Pause.*)

SECOND MAN (*who has walked to the front right, and leans his arm upon the railing as he looks beyond the river toward the city*). It will begin to grow light soon. The world will wake soon—wake without us. It's a hard world.

FIRST MAN (*softly*). It's hard, yes, but it's not quite the same world that it was to me before—

SECOND MAN (*eyeing him curiously*). Before—

FIRST MAN (*very deliberately*). Before I'd looked into my enemy's soul—your soul.

SECOND MAN (*after a loaded pause*). I feel that, too. It is I who should feel it. I have found out that an anarchist is a human being, and you (*he smiles drearily*) you've found out nothing except that a governor is a poor devil.

FIRST MAN. It's a world of poor devils.

SECOND MAN. Yes. We shan't hinder them any more.

FIRST MAN. We shan't help them any more.

SECOND MAN. Have we helped them?

FIRST MAN. I don't know. (*There is a long pause.*)

SECOND MAN. May I say something more to you?

FIRST MAN. Anything you like.

SECOND MAN. Men who want to die and are afraid to die sometimes make what they call a suicide pact. Ours is a little like that, only we're not afraid. I was thinking—(*He stops.*)

FIRST MAN. Go on.

SECOND MAN. I was thinking—if two men like us could make a *life*-pact—

FIRST MAN. What do you mean?

SECOND MAN. Consider. We have each met to-night what we thought was the worst in life; you have met it in me, and I in you. Well, was the worst what you thought it?

FIRST MAN (*emphatically*). No.

SECOND MAN (*looking squarely at him*). It wasn't what I thought it either.

FIRST MAN. And you think if that is true—

SECOND MAN. I think we owe life another chance.

FIRST MAN (*rather moodily*). I've given it fifty-three chances already.

SECOND MAN. Give it fifty-four.

FIRST MAN. You think it deserves another chance?

SECOND MAN. I think it's earned it to-night.

FIRST MAN. For how long?

SECOND MAN. Any time you like—say a year.

FIRST MAN. And if life doesn't make good—

SECOND MAN. Then we die—each in his own way.

FIRST MAN (*pointing to the water*). Why not this way? Why not together?

SECOND MAN. Good. Hand-in-hand if you like.

FIRST MAN. I should like that. (*A brief pause.*) We meet here, then?

SECOND MAN. Yes. The river'll wait for us.

FIRST MAN. It's like death—the river. It waits, but it's there.

SECOND MAN (*looking at his watch*). I must go shortly. My chauffeur will be raging. We rich men are afraid of our own servants.

FIRST MAN (*simply*). I had forgotten you were rich.

SECOND MAN (*quite as simply*). That was good of you. (*A second brief pause*). It's a bargain, then?

FIRST MAN. Yes.

SECOND MAN. Your hand on it.

FIRST MAN (*looking at his hand in the dim light*). It's not your kind of hand.

SECOND MAN (*taking it in his*). It's *just* my kind.

FIRST MAN. Let us be clear with each other. What are we agreeing to?

SECOND MAN. We give life one more chance. If it succeeds, well and good; if it doesn't—

FIRST MAN (*continuing as the second pauses*). One year from now—

SECOND MAN. On this night—

FIRST MAN. At two o'clock—

SECOND MAN. Upon this bridge—

FIRST MAN. We meet—for life or death. (*He offers his hand.*)

SECOND MAN (*clasping the hand*). For life or death.

FIRST MAN. It's growing light. You shouldn't stay here.

SECOND MAN. True. (*After a last pressure, he turns, then looks back.*) I can't drop you anywhere—with the limousine?

FIRST MAN. At a fifteen-cent lodging-place? What would the chauffeur think? (*They laugh, and turn from each other as the curtain falls.*)

THE LOOKING-GLASS

CHARACTERS

JARED ORMSBY
ELINOR ORMSBY
HOWARD BRERE (*not speaking*)
GUY MERRIFIELD
KATRINA BRERE

Scene: a section of the deck of the La Plata, *ocean liner, at half past ten of a bright morning in late May. Blue sea is visible at the right. A passage-way is at the left. Steamer chairs are irregularly placed. Elinor Ormsby, a handsome woman of twenty-nine, appears at the left, followed by Guy Merrifield, delicate-featured, a year or two older than she.*

ELINOR (*seating herself*). Sit down, Guy.

GUY (*protesting*). Be persuaded, dearest. Do come down to the cabin.

ELINOR. My dear Guy, I've been morally in the cabin all my life and I'm on deck at last for a whiff of fresh air. That's why I'm here with you. (*Playfully imperious.*) Sit down.

GUY (*reluctantly obeying*). It's your safety I'm thinking of.

ELINOR. It's safety I'm running from. I hope it won't chase me.

GUY. But this place—so public! Any one might be here, your friends—even Jared.

ELINOR (*pensively*). Jared would be decent.

GUY. But—

ELINOR. I know. I feel so, too. I'm afraid of his decency.

GUY. Why, dear?

ELINOR (*smiling*). It might arouse mine. Decency is infectious. At least Jared's is.

GUY (*anxiously*). You don't repent?

ELINOR (*facing him radiantly*). Do I look like a penitent?

GUY. Like a goddess rather.

ELINOR (*she checks an attempted kiss*). Safety, you know. (*She touches his shoulder lightly.*) Yet I am doing penance in a way. I sneaked away without telling Jared . . . I'm trying to get back a little self-respect by sitting here publicly with you. It's very silly.

GUY. You think he would have held you?

ELINOR. Not he. That's what I couldn't face. Jared is rather fine sometimes. It's a pity he's so uninteresting.

GUY. I hope I shan't bore you.

ELINOR. So do I. (*He looks a little crestfallen, and she laughs.*) Oh, I'm not worrying yet. But that is my weak point. Be brutal to me if you like, Guy, but don't be tedious. I want a change.

GUY. If I'm pretty brutal most of the time, I may be affectionate now and then, mayn't I?

ELINOR. You shall have a day off sometimes.

GUY. Was Jared never brutal to you?

ELINOR. Never. He hasn't spoiled your chance.

GUY. I suppose you left a note for him.

ELINOR. No, I shall send a wireless this afternoon. (*There is a slight silence which Elinor breaks.*) Do you see that man leaning against the rail over there? (*She points to the right.*)

GUY. The puffy one? Chin rather like layer-cake?

ELINOR. Yes. I know that man, I think.

GUY (*urgently*). Dearest, let us go below.

ELINOR. Be reasonable, Guy. We are safe here just because the place is public. No one will believe that two persons who are seen together here have anything to hide. Besides, I still have a reputation. It's good for another half-hour.

GUY. But, Elinor—

ELINOR. You are repeating yourself, Guy. Jared was always repeating himself. Look at that woman—talking to the man. I know her, too.

GUY. Oh, if you know the woman, too—

ELINOR. I wish she'd turn around. I believe—no, I don't believe—that's Katrina Brere. No, Katrina wouldn't wear that gown. It's a made-over gown.

GUY. Who is Katrina?

ELINOR. Katrina is Katrina Horton, an old school-girl friend of mine. Later, Katrina Sanborn. Later still, Katrina Brere.

GUY (*feeling his way*). A widow?

ELINOR. No, Mr. Sanborn was enjoying excellent health at last accounts. He runs a chain of elevators in South Dakota. But four years ago Katrina left him.

GUY. With Mr. Brere?

ELINOR (*gravely final*). With Mr. Brere. (*Suddenly she smiles.*) You needn't look so petrified, Guy. The thing does occur, you know.

GUY (*seizing her hand*). I know.

ELINOR. She has Katrina's shoulder—and Katrina's ankle. I wish she would turn round.

GUY. I don't.

ELINOR. There—she has turned round to punish you for your ill manners. It *is* Katrina.

GUY (*entreatingly*). Let us go down into the cabin.

ELINOR. My dear, we can't avoid her on a ship. How old should you think she was?

GUY (*a trifle curtly*). Thirty-six.

ELINOR. Just thirty. A year older than I am.

GUY (*fervently*). Ah, *you!*

ELINOR (*with real feeling*). I am so glad I saw her first. It would have hurt her not to be known at once. You should have seen her complexion.

GUY (*decisively*). There's only one complexion in America.

ELINOR (*mischievously*). And that one's starting for Asia.

Poor America! (*With a start.*) She has seen us. (*She waves her hand.*) No, Guy, it's no use, I can't snub Katrina.

GUY (*controlling his impatience*). Shall I go away, then?

ELINOR. No, not yet. You have to be explained, and I can explain you better if you are here. (*Whimsically.*) Control yourself, dear. You mustn't let people see your agitation.

GUY (*half raging, half amused*). Elinor!

KATRINA BRERE (*coming up hesitantly*). You know me, Elinor? (*Mrs. Brere's melancholy voice keeps the traces of what was once an agreeable and pungent dryness.*)

ELINOR (*rising and taking Katrina's two hands tenderly in her own*). It is you, Katrina.

KATRINA. I am afraid it is.

ELINOR (*briskly*). Don't be afraid of being so delightful a thing as Katrina San-Br-Horton. This is Mr. Merrifield, Jared's friend. Mr. Merrifield, Mrs. Brere.

KATRINA (*reconsidering an impulse to put out her hand*). How do you do?

GUY (*very politely*). How do you do? Beautiful morning.

KATRINA. Very.

ELINOR. The morning is too lovely to be wasted in commonplaces. Mr. Merrifield, if you want to be very good indeed to two very selfish women, you will leave them to chat about their schooldays, and go off and look—and look for Jared.

GUY (*rising*). I shall be very happy. (*He bows to Katrina and goes out.*)

ELINOR. Sit down, Katrina, and tell me all about yourself. You are off for Europe?

KATRINA (*sitting down*). Yes, if—I mean yes. It is our third trip since—

ELINOR (*understandingly*). Yes. It was Mr. Brere with you by the railing?

KATRINA. Yes.

ELINOR. I wasn't quite sure at first. He has—changed.

KATRINA (*with mild bitterness*). I've changed, you mean.

ELINOR (*stoutly*). I mean we've all changed. You can't imagine how bald Jared is.

KATRINA (*faintly smiling*). I remember. He began early.

ELINOR. He has persevered.

KATRINA (*faintly deprecating this sally*). He was very kind to me. I hope he is well.

ELINOR. Oh, Jared flourishes like—like a new banknote.

KATRINA. And you?

ELINOR. Oh, I am ridiculously healthy. I even grow plump.

KATRINA (*judicially*). Not you.

ELINOR. Well, then, the scales are libelous. When a woman is getting close to thirty, the scales do become shockingly incorrect.

KATRINA. They don't libel me.

ELINOR (*with instant tenderness*). Ah, my dear! You *are* thin, Katrina. Tell me about yourself. Tell me all. I have heard nothing in four years.

KATRINA. You didn't answer my letters.

ELINOR. I answered the first.

KATRINA. Yes; but the others.

ELINOR (*putting her hand upon Katrina's*). I know.

KATRINA (*almost affectionately*). You do me good, Elinor. You don't lie.

ELINOR. I'm not honest, Katrina, I couldn't find the right lie —that was all. But I didn't look down on you—it wasn't that. I felt that I didn't know how to write. I had lost your address, as it were, not actually, but morally, and I felt that I might be writing to you in Madagascar when you were really in Bagdad.

KATRINA (*with a slight smile*). Well, it's in Madagascar that I've been—or Senegambia.

ELINOR (*vibratingly*). You've been unhappy? (*Katrina re-*

plies with a sadly whimsical wave of the hand). Isn't he good to you?

KATRINA. Decent.

ELINOR. Nothing better than that?

KATRINA. Nothing worse—except—

ELINOR. Except—?

KATRINA (*in a low tone*). When he drinks.

ELINOR. Katrina! My dear! Does he—do it often?

KATRINA. In that sort of thing—seldom is often. (*She pauses.*) There are many excuses for Howard. Our life is idle and sometimes lonely. A bottle is occupation—and company.

ELINOR. You mean you're not—invited?

KATRINA. Not quite that. We're not outcasts—not in the old sense. There are people of our own sort everywhere, but we don't like to go too much with them—it's like joining a leper colony. Nice people—old friends—shake hands with us. Many of them invite us to week-ends—just once. It's their way of getting rid of us. It isn't a harsh way, but it's like opening the door to a tramp and shutting it in his face.

ELINOR. They are cruel.

KATRINA. No, they're not cruel. People aren't so virtuous and they aren't so conventional as they used to be, but they're just as indifferent. They're more indifferent. If you're there—in society—they won't put you out, but if you are not there, they won't fetch you in. Society wants an inducement—it wants a bribe. We haven't money and we haven't caste. We haven't even notoriety any longer.

ELINOR. Katrina, I haven't any self-respect left. It's all leaked away while you talked. Why didn't you write to me—I mean, why didn't I write to you?

KATRINA. I don't blame you.

ELINOR. (*Slightly hesitating*). Hasn't—hasn't Howard any work?

KATRINA (*mildly satirical*). Yes, Howard has an occupa-

tion. He's a picture-broker. Don't look so bewildered, Elinor; it isn't flattering. He buys pictures for the ignorant —when they let him. The ignorant are very plentiful, but we don't get rich.

ELINOR (*discreetly*). I knew his taste was good.

KATRINA (*with a slight shrug*). It's not good enough to feed and clothe us. You noticed my dress. It's all right, dear—I know you did. You see there isn't much in brokerage and the little there is is uncertain. But it makes an excuse for voyages.

ELINOR. You move about a good deal, then?

KATRINA (*drily*). We have to, my dear—the tradesmen. (*Elinor puts her arm impulsively round Katrina, who goes on with a tremor in her voice*). It hasn't been—nice.

ELINOR (*remorsefully*). And I didn't know. Jared has money —portmanteaux full.

KATRINA (*nerving herself for an ordeal*). Elinor!

ELINOR (*encouragingly*). Yes?

KATRINA. I've sunk pretty low. And I'm sinking lower this very minute. Elinor, we are in great distress. We are going to Europe and we haven't enough money to pay our fare. Don't speak yet. Let me explain. Howard has a friend, Curtis Denby, who agreed to send the money to us on the boat this morning. It hasn't come. The boat goes in ten minutes. The money may come yet, but you know—I mean we know—how these promises work out. If the money doesn't come, Elinor, could we—borrow—three hundred dollars of you? (*Her voice sinks.*)

ELINOR. Surely. (*She remembers with a start of realization that the balances of Mrs. Jared Ormsby are no longer subject to her cheque.*) That is—I think—you see, Katrina—

KATRINA. I shouldn't have asked, I suppose; of course I shouldn't. But you said Jared had so much, and (*her rueful humor breaking out again*) we don't need a portmanteauful.

ELINOR. Katrina, I will share with you all I have—only—You want it at once, don't you?

KATRINA. Yes, if we need it at all. There is always the chance—

ELINOR (*imperiously*). Katrina, go and ask Mr. Brere if the money has come. And—if you meet Mr. Merrifield—he's on the deck somewhere looking for Jared—send him to me. Don't question me now. I've lots to explain later. (*Katrina, after a curious glance at Elinor, moves off in silence. Elinor paces to and fro in a small circuit before the chairs. She stops as Guy Merrifield enters.*) You are here at last, Guy. Sit down.

GUY. You've kept me waiting a long time. (*He presses her hand.*)

ELINOR (*withdrawing her hand abruptly, then suddenly replacing it*). Guy, how much are you worth?

GUY (*shocked*). Elinor!

ELINOR (*distressed, yet laughing*). It isn't what Isolde would have said to Tristan, is it?

GUY (*a little sourly*). Not the first day.

ELINOR (*in the same tone*). I know it isn't in the books, dear, but I presume they had a great deal of unreported conversation.

GUY (*putting his arm gently round her*). Can you think of money now?

ELINOR. I know, dear, it isn't romantic, but—console yourself—it's—it's hysterical. A woman in my situation is entitled to a little hysteria.

GUY. Hysteria, if you like, but not sordidness.

ELINOR. Am I sordid? I think I'm sensible. I've been talking with Katrina. It gives one a heartfelt respect for money, Guy, to sit beside poor Katrina—and Katrina's gown. But you haven't answered my question.

GUY (*with displeasure*). You really wish that I should answer that question?

ELINOR. Of course I do. I never asked you before, Guy—do me that justice; that's why I don't know.

GUY (*stiffly*). I have an income of six thousand dollars a year from United States Steel Corporation bonds.

ELINOR. Six thousand.

GUY (*in the same tone*). Six thousand? Shall I write it down for you?

ELINOR. My dear Guy, I was quite right to run away with you. You will never bore me with politeness like Jared.

GUY (*repentantly*). I'm a brute.

ELINOR. Oh no, not quite that yet; only making very rapid progress. Six thousand!

GUY (*humbly*). It's very little.

ELINOR (*thinking aloud*). I'm afraid I'm expensive.

GUY (*with ardor*). You're priceless!

ELINOR. No doubt, but that doesn't quite meet the case. Guy, can you let me have three hundred dollars for Katrina?

GUY (*dumbfounded*). For Katrina?

ELINOR. And Howard, too, of course.

GUY. Oh, Howard, too.

ELINOR. They have no money for their passage to Europe. That is, they have it if it comes, but their money usually doesn't come—so Katrina says.

GUY (*bracing himself for refusal*). I am very sorry, my dear, but I have only eighteen hundred dollars in travelers' cheques. I don't think we can spare three hundred.

ELINOR. Of course, my dear, you mustn't give her what we can't afford. I wish I'd known about this yesterday. (*Guy winces.*) I wish Jared could know now. (*Guy winces again.*)

GUY (*hesitating*). I suppose they understand—you told them about us?

ELINOR (*with abrupt vehemence*). I'm a vile thing, Guy. I didn't.

GUY (*rather relieved*). Well, why should you?

ELINOR. It was base, it was cruel, not to tell her, and I didn't. Would you believe it, Guy, I wanted another half hour of respectability—a last look at the receding shore, as they say. I posed as Mrs. Jared Ormsby, the stainless wife; I crowed over her. I let her grovel, and I enjoyed it.

GUY. What does it matter? They'll find it out in an hour anyway.

ELINOR (*pensively*). If they're not put off the ship.

GUY (*with forced indifference*). Yes, if they're not put off. (*There is constrained silence.*)

ELINOR (*partly changing the subject*). You saw Katrina, Guy?

GUY. Yes.

ELINOR. Should you like to be married to her?

GUY. What are you talking about?

ELINOR. Never mind, should you?

GUY. Give me credit for eyesight, at least.

ELINOR. You *are* marrying her, I think.

GUY. What do you mean?

ELINOR. We've found a looking-glass on this deck. Katrina Brere—that's Elinor Ormsby or Elinor Merrifield five years hence.

GUY (*indignantly*). You compare yourself to that dilapidated—

ELINOR (*not without quiet mischief*). Katrina Sanborn was a very handsome woman. (*She pauses.*) And she wore very pretty gowns—quite as pretty as mine, people thought. (*She smooths her own gown.*)

GUY (*hotly*). This is madness.

ELINOR. No, dear, only hysteria. Well, you've seen Katrina, and I—I've seen Howard.

GUY (*deeply hurt*). If you had cared for me even a little, Elinor, you could not have said that.

ELINOR. Women say all kinds of things to the men they love, dearest. They haven't the delicacy of men.

GUY (*still writhing*). To compare me to that sodden wretch—

ELINOR. I know it's inhuman. It would have been inhuman once to compare another person to that sodden wretch.

GUY. What other person?

ELINOR. Howard Brere five years ago.

GUY. Why do you say this—now? (*The "now" is eloquent.*)

ELINOR. When a woman passes a looking-glass, she has to look in. We shall live with that glass in front of us. (*Laughing.*) Every morning you'll be looking into my face for symptoms of Katrina, and I shall be looking into yours and calling out "Howard, ahoy."

GUY (*controlling his exasperation*). People grow old everywhere, my dear. They grow old in the most regular marriage.

ELINOR. I don't know. Jared is bald, but otherwise he's rather good-looking.

GUY (*pursuing his own thought*). These people have been used up by the rough-and-tumble life they've lived. They haven't any money, while we—

ELINOR (*demurely*). We have six thousand dollars.

GUY (*turning away his head*). Despise it if you like.

ELINOR. No, I don't despise it. I respect that six thousand dollars as a tight-rope dancer respects his tight-rope. It's all that saves him from destruction. But it isn't a boulevard.

GUY. Elinor!

ELINOR (*putting a hand on his shoulder*). Forgive me, dear. I don't elope the least bit well. You see it's the first time I've done any eloping, and I'm not up in the technique.

GUY (*reproachfully*). Our first real hour together!

ELINOR. I know, Guy, I know. I'm not worth running off with. Katrina would have been all gleams and glooms, all fears and blushes. Only you see Katrina hadn't looked in the glass.

GUY (*struck with an idea*). Look here. You shan't live on that six thousand dollars. I'll earn something.

ELINOR. Yes. (*There is a pause.*) You might be a picture-broker.

GUY. A what?

ELINOR. A picture-broker. That's what he is.

GUY. What he is? Ah, then— (*He makes a quick gesture of rejection.*)

ELINOR (*diverging a little*). He drinks, you know, and when he drinks—

GUY. Well?

ELINOR. I think—

GUY (*impatiently*). What do you think?

ELINOR (*slowly*). I think he beats her.

GUY (*dismayed*). Did she say that?

ELINOR. No, she didn't sa-a-ay that.

GUY (*turning abruptly and squarely facing her*). Let me look at you.

ELINOR (*meeting his eyes*). Well?

GUY. Are you thinking that about us?

ELINOR (*with her old mockery*). What will you do if I say "Yes"? Beat me? (*They look at one another for ten seconds, then both laugh, but Guy's laugh is forlorn. Elinor goes on.*) We'll save that for Act V; Act I is quite sensational enough already.

GUY (*his face has become grave*). Elinor—if this should be only the rehearsal, if (*he hesitates*) we called off the play—(*Elinor says nothing but looks into his face, and with a matter-of-course air puts up her hand and removes a threadlet from his coat-sleeve. There is an implication of possessorship in the little act that is indescribably reassuring. Guy goes on almost in a whisper.*) Then you don't—you don't want me to take you back to Jared?

ELINOR (*resuming her poise*). No, you can't take me back to Jared for a great many reasons. First, you see, I love you. That's only incidental, but I mention it. Then it wouldn't be fair to Katrina.

GUY. To Katrina?

ELINOR. Yes, Katrina must have her revenge; I owe it to her. You see I played the saint with Katrina just now. It was odious of me, and now I have to play the sinner to make it up to her.

GUY (*unappreciatively*). Ah!

ELINOR. And there's another reason. You see, after all, Guy, I'm a quiet little girl and I'm not equal to two sensations in one day. It took every atom of will I had to get me here, and I haven't an atom left to take me back. No, we've motored out miles and miles into the suburbs, and the oil is out, and there isn't a drop to be had for miles and miles, and all we can do is to stop where we are and rummage for the sandwiches. I hope they'll be good sandwiches, don't you? Oh, I sha'n't desert you, dear. (*Her face lights with sudden mischief.*) Katrina is faithful. Katrina will cling to her Howard.

(*Angered beyond all self-control, Guy seizes Elinor's shoulder with an energy that is only one remove from violence. She is quick to put her own construction on the act, and looking up into his face and then down upon her shoulder, says with arch malice.*) Already? He doesn't beat her in public, you know. (*Guy looks at her in utter desperation, then loosing his hold upon the shoulder, buries his face in his hands with a sound that hovers between a sob and a laugh. Elinor touches his hair lightly, but withdraws her hand abruptly as Katrina enters from the right with an expression of relief which in a less worn and anxious face would look like gladness. Guy raises his head.*)

KATRINA. It's all right, Elinor. We have the money. Mr. Denby was called out of town suddenly by the death of a relative, but he has sent the money to us by a friend. Guess who.

ELINOR. Katrina dear, I am very glad that you have the money, but since I don't know one of Mr. Denby's friends

or even Mr. Denby, I must really be excused from guessing which friend it is.

KATRINA. You shall see for yourself. Come, Howard. Come, Mr. Ormsby. (*Two men, who have been following Katrina at a leisurely pace from the right, appear. They are Howard Brere and Jared Ormsby. Ormsby, thirty-eight years old, in a gray spring suit, perfectly tailored, perfectly groomed, with a carriage which dignifies both his short stature and his rotund frame, is an impressive and tranquil figure. There is a measured and stately probity in the man which confirms Elinor's hint that he might be tedious in domesticity, but which invests his smallest act with real dignity, a dignity that might rise, on occasion, to magnificence. On seeing his wife and Guy Merrifield, Jared starts, but controls himself, and maintains a watchful silence. Elinor and Guy have risen by a common impulse. Instinctively their hands seek each other, but recede before they meet. Both feel the embarrassment and also the relief occasioned by the presence of the Breres. Elinor faces Jared with a look in which the distress proper to the crisis is curiously mingled with something of a connoisseur's interest in the testing of a virtuoso. But the minute of silence in which he collects his thoughts throws her back upon her own initiative. With the coolness of a gamester who stakes his fortune on a throw, she takes her leap.*)

ELINOR. Well, Jared, you have certainly kept us all waiting. I don't know what excuse you have made to Katrina and Howard. As for me, in despair of any symptom of a husband, I very nearly ran off to China with Mr. Merrifield. (*Her look calls on Guy for support.*)

GUY (*playing up to Elinor's lead, in a light tone*). I *did* ask her.

JARED (*he has grasped the situation and made his choice*). I am certainly much to blame. (*To Katrina and Howard.*) Elinor and I had started to see Mr. Merrifield aboard the

steamer when Denby's message reached me. I sent Elinor ahead with Merrifield while I cashed a cheque for you. The clerks were busy; it took an unpardonable time, and my apologies are most sincere and humble.

(*Elinor turns toward Guy with a sort of rueful triumph—triumph in Jared's adequacy and ruefulness for Guy's discomfiture and her own. All this, however, is eased and lightened by the quickness of her response to the humor of the checkmate. She moves instinctively toward Jared, and, though the touch she applies to his arm is feather-like and passing, it is enough to make Guy bow his head.*)

KATRINA. Howard, we mustn't keep Jared and Elinor from Mr. Merrifield. Thank you both ever so much. (*Amid salutations and handshakings Howard and Katrina go out. The last bell for departure sounds.*)

GUY (*to Jared, with a pretense of lightness, but with profound meaning*). I can trust you, I suppose, to take Mrs. Ormsby back?

JARED. Certainly. I knew that she was safe in your hands, Merrifield. You may be sure she will be safe in mine. Goodbye. (*He offers his hand to Guy; the pressure that follows is a compact.*)

ELINOR (*offering her hand to Guy*). Goodbye. You will write to us, won't you? From Tangier!

GUY (*kissing her hand*). No, I stay only three hours in Tangier. From Cairo. (*As they turn to leave the ship.*) What shall I send you from Bagdad?

ELINOR (*looking back*). Oh, anything simple and very pretty —a feather fan—or a bangle—or— (*She looks at him half archly, half sadly.*) A looking-glass. Goodbye again.

GUY. Goodbye. (*He sits down, resting his arm upon the deck-rail, and watches the receding figures thoughtfully.*)

CURTAIN

THE ANSWER

CHARACTERS

ROBERT DE MARIGNY, *French gentleman in Poitou*
HUBERT DE MARIGNY, *his younger brother*
CLÉMENCE DE MARIGNY, *his wife*
WALTER DE SOUMET, *his neighbor*

The action takes place in the afternoon of a bright day in the late seventeenth century. The curtain rises on the main room of a small-town inn, almost deserted and curiously silent in the apathy to which it is reduced by the departure of hosts and guests to a neighboring fair in which a juggler is expected to display his skill. In the right wall, entrance door, and, further forward, window; a door at left opens into the inner rooms. Bar in the rear; in the wall behind, windows with lowered curtains. The room is dim and cool. At first glance it seems entirely deserted, but the eye in time becomes aware of the seated figure of a man facing a small table left behind a folding-screen. Tankard and two glasses on the table; the man's elbow rests upon it. His look is at once tired and alert; his heavy riding-boots are splashed with mud.
The entrance door opens to admit Walter de Soumet and Clémence de Marigny, both in riding-gear.

WALTER. Sit down, Clémence. There must be some one here. (*He calls.*) Landlord! Waiter! (*No response but melancholy echoes.*) Landlord!

CLÉMENCE (*who has not sat down*). I need nothing. Let us go forward.

WALTER. You must have food and wine. Besides, there is the broken saddle-girth. Landlord!

ROBERT (*rising and coming from behind the screen*). They have all gone to the fair. Could I serve you?

WALTER, CLÉMENCE (*as with one impulse*). You!

ROBERT. I can vouch for the ale. (*He points to a tap behind the bar.*) The wine, I suppose, is locked in the cellar.

WALTER (*regaining self-control*). You have overtaken us?

ROBERT. *You* have overtaken me. (*To Clémence.*) You hated me to that point?

CLÉMENCE (*calmly*). I loved him.

ROBERT. Am I so little, then? Not even a motive for departure?

CLÉMENCE (*still calmly*). Not *the* motive.

WALTER. M. de Marigny, the past is doubtless interesting, but the present is urgent.

ROBERT. You have a suggestion?

WALTER (*a little perplexed*). Have you none? (*Pause.*) You have an injury, and we both have swords.

ROBERT. An old resort, M. de Soumet.

WALTER (*half contemptuously*). Have you a new one?

ROBERT. No. That is my difficulty. I doubt if it be very wise to kill you, but to forgive you would be ridiculous. We must fight.

WALTER (*sneeringly*). Most Frenchmen would not have taken two minutes to discover the necessity.

ROBERT (*tranquilly*). Probably not. I happen to be Robert de Marigny. (*To Clémence.*) You really want him—*him?*

CLÉMENCE (*who finds the stress on the "him" intolerable*). I did not hate you—till this second.

ROBERT (*to Walter, after a long look at Clémence*). Shall we make haste? My brother is watering our horses in the stables. He is younger than I am—and angrier. His absence is a convenience. (*They draw their swords.*)

WALTER. Are our swords of the same length? (*He takes Robert's and compares it with his own.*) Yours is a half-inch shorter. Will you take mine?

ROBERT. One of us must use the shorter.

WALTER. I am the younger man.

ROBERT (*taking Walter's sword*). True. Let us fight daintily—with all the condiments. (*They fight. Robert disarms Walter, whose sword is dashed from his hand and carried some feet from the combatants.*)

WALTER. Kill me. (*Clémence comes to Walter's side and takes his arm.*) You mean to kill me, I suppose?

ROBERT (*reflectively*). I suppose so. I am a French husband. And routine is inexorable.

CLÉMENCE. I die with him.

ROBERT. Why don't you ask his life?

CLÉMENCE. Could he take his life from you?

ROBERT. *You* might.

CLÉMENCE. I? Thank you. It is good to die in saying "No" to that.

WALTER (*fervently*). Ah, my dearest!

ROBERT (*in an inexplicable tone*). You love like that? (*He raises the blade, then lowers it instantly. The conflict in his mind is evident.*)

CLÉMENCE (*to Walter*). We shall never be more each other's than in this moment.

WALTER. Never so much.

CLÉMENCE (*ardently*). The sword shall marry us.

ROBERT. The sword shall *marry* you! (*He looks intently at the sword, then almost curiously at the two faces lighted up with one ardor of resolution.*) Living or dead, they elude me, but— (*A thought strikes him.*)

WALTER. Why do you hesitate?

ROBERT (*with an inscrutable look, which is the outcome of profound reflection*). Yes. The sword *shall* marry you. *He turns the sword against his own breast, pushes it home, and falls heavily to the ground.*)

CLÉMENCE (*clinging to Walter*). Ah!

WALTER. Kind gods!

CLÉMENCE (*suddenly detaching herself from Walter*). He is dead? (*Walter bends over the fallen man. Then he looks at Clémence, with affirmation in his eyes.*) You are—quite sure? (*She speaks with effort.*) He had—lapses—sometimes. (*Walter searches for signs of life.*)

WALTER. Dead.

CLÉMENCE. *He* has married us.

WALTER (*protesting.*) His sword. Not even his. *My* sword.

CLÉMENCE (*standing by Robert*). He is very great.

WALTER. You mean "was."

CLÉMENCE (*still looking at Robert*). Do I? His death has made him alive for me.

WALTER (*trying to draw Clémence away*). If he's alive for you—you mustn't look at him like that.

CLÉMENCE (*still looking at Robert*). I want only you.

WALTER. You *have* me now.

CLÉMENCE. I have you as his gift.

WALTER. Does that matter?

CLÉMENCE (*facing Walter*). Can you take *me* from *him*? (*Brief pause.*)

WALTER. Aren't you taking me from him?

CLÉMENCE (*after a moment's reflection*). Yes,—if I take you.

WALTER. If?

CLÉMENCE. It is all so different.

WALTER. Different? Yes, a bar has gone,—his life.

CLÉMENCE. A bar has come—his death.

WALTER. Can that divide us?

CLÉMENCE. Not just that. If you had killed him, I could have stepped over his body—yes, or upon it—into your arms. But now—

WALTER. Well?

CLÉMENCE. I am a thief to whom the master of the house has offered the key of his treasure-vault. It's not easy to use that key.

WALTER. You despised him three hours ago.

CLÉMENCE. I begin to think that three hours is a long time.

WALTER. You left him.

CLÉMENCE (*pointing to Robert*). Not *that* man. It's all different.

WALTER (*reasonably*). If we could recall him to life, Clémence,—

CLÉMENCE (*receptively*). I know.

WALTER (*encouraged*). But since we can only make his death useless——

CLÉMENCE. We can put it away from us.

WALTER. Put what away?

CLÉMENCE. His death.

WALTER. How?

CLÉMENCE (*answering indirectly*). If we gain by it, we are —accomplices.

WALTER (*jealously*). You love him perhaps.

CLÉMENCE (*unhesitatingly*). No. (*Walter moves toward her. Instinctively she puts Robert's body between them.*)

WALTER (*with a cry of pain*). He *is* between us. (*He reaches out his arms across the body. She points to the still Robert. Long silence.*)

WALTER (*in a low, almost cautious, voice*). Clémence, suppose this—(*he indicates the relative position of the three*)—were what he—

CLÉMENCE. Well?

WALTER (*very low*). Foresaw?

CLÉMENCE (*with revulsion*). Ah!

WALTER. He was a crafty man.

CLÉMENCE (*very low, and shrinkingly*). He is dead, Walter.

WALTER (*also very low, but gaining confidence*). I know. If his death were his trap for us—

CLÉMENCE (*still with intense revulsion*). There are things one —*doesn't*—imagine.

WALTER. They happen for all that.

CLÉMENCE. To stab himself to—part us! He wasn't base enough for that.

WALTER. Was he good enough to stab himself to bring us together? (*Pause. Both are uncertain.*) You knew him better than I did—surely. What *was* he?

CLÉMENCE (*looking at Robert*). *Did* I know him? (*Pause.*) He was a strange man. There was a dog once, a neighbor's dog, who had bitten him. He found the dog wounded, nursed it, healed it, made it love him. Then—

WALTER. Then?

CLÉMENCE. He drove it off. Once, when it came back the third time, he stoned it. He wanted the rare—in good or evil.

WALTER. That would work either way. To benefit his enemies by his death, or to confound them by his death—such a man would have enjoyed either.

CLÉMENCE (*beseechingly*). Look into his face, Walter. *Which* did he mean?

WALTER (*after a long look*). I cannot tell. There are many furrows in that face.

CLÉMENCE (*musingly*). There were many folds in his mind. (*A silence.*) We shall never know.

WALTER. Come, then.

CLÉMENCE. Where?

WALTER. To the church. The priest will marry us—now.

CLÉMENCE. Marriage? (*She points to Robert*). He gives us everything—even innocence. He gives too much.

WALTER. He meant to part us, believe me.

CLÉMENCE (*imploringly*). *Make* me believe you.

WALTER. Come outside. You will believe me there.

CLÉMENCE. Outside, yes. In the courtyard, in the sun, I shall know perhaps—

WALTER (*almost impatiently*). Know what?

CLÉMENCE. If I shall go with you, or back—to his house.

WALTER. You will go with me.

CLÉMENCE. Perhaps. Here I cannot tell. The dead are too powerful.

WALTER. Come!

CLÉMENCE (*stopping in the act of departure*). I cannot leave him—this way.

WALTER. His brother is here. He will do what is needed.

CLÉMENCE. It isn't that. He meant greatly by us—perhaps. (*More firmly.*) I want you to let me kiss him.

WALTER. Kiss him—your husband.

CLÉMENCE. I should not kiss my husband. I should kiss—our friend.

WALTER (*looking at her sombrely*). I begin to wish he had killed me.

CLÉMENCE (*meeting this with firm intelligence*). In that case I should have kissed you without asking him.

WALTER (*with sudden resolve*). Kiss him—but kiss me first.

CLÉMENCE (*about to comply, but suddenly checking herself*). Would that be fair to him?

WALTER (*after a pause*). No. (*Their eyes meet for a moment in the deliciousness of mutual comprehension.*) I leave you for a moment—with him. I must look for that saddle-girth. (*He starts toward the door left.*)

CLÉMENCE (*arresting him*). But—Hubert!

WALTER. The brother? (*He reflects.*) I can't *shun* him, Clémence.

CLÉMENCE (*imperiously*). Yes, yes. Not two lives—for us—in one day.

WALTER (*again after reflection*). Very well. I must try to mend the girth myself. (*He crosses to the entrance door, pausing at the threshold.*) Follow me instantly, Clémence. He mustn't see *you* either. (*Clémence makes an assenting sign. Walter goes out. Clémence bends over the fallen body, lays a woman's firmly tender hand upon the hair, then,*

with a movement that has the gravity of a sacrament, bends still lower and kisses Robert's lips. Raising her head, she looks, almost as it were inquiringly, into the face; then, with another light touch upon the hair, she rises, goes to the door, pauses for a single backward look, and goes out. The sound of the closing door is portentous between the two enclosing silences.

There follows a very long pause as pauses are measured on the stage. At last the eyes of the fallen man open; the lips unclose. He raises himself with toil upon one elbow, then makes several strenuous, but ineffectual, attempts to arrive at a sitting posture. Finding this impossible, he chooses as the best alternative a half-reclining posture, and, using the lifted and lowered left hand as a fulcrum, edges his slow and arduous way toward the window right that overlooks the highway. It is plain that he wishes to see the lovers when they ride forth. He succeeds in grasping the window-sill with his outstretched hand, but is foiled in repeated efforts to bring his eyes within range of the lowest section of the glass. At this point Hubert de Marigny enters by the door left. He looks about, first curiously, then anxiously, then, perceiving Robert, joins him at the window.)

HUBERT. Robert!

ROBERT. You come in good time. I need a man's arm, Hubert. I am to die shortly, and before I die there is something that I want to see. Lift me up first; then ask questions. (*Hubert lifts Robert in his arms to a point at which the courtyard and the highway become visible.*)

HUBERT (*breathlessly*). Who has done this?

ROBERT. I did it.

HUBERT (*confounded*). Why?

ROBERT. That is what I shall know, Hubert, when the two of them ride out.

HUBERT. The two of them?

ROBERT. De Soumet and my wife. I had beaten him—was

ready to kill him, when—when something turned my point against myself. Hubert!

HUBERT. Yes?

ROBERT. My lips—are they as usual?

HUBERT. Yes,—only pale.

ROBERT (*greatly surprised*). Pale! I thought they were ruddy. (*He touches his lips with his hand.*) She kissed me. (*Pause.*) She has not kissed me for years—willingly.

HUBERT. Why to-day, then?

ROBERT. She thought I had died for them. (*He meditates.*) Had I?

HUBERT. You know surely.

ROBERT. No. The kiss blurred everything. It woke the man in me—the husband. I am not sure now what the other man wanted.

HUBERT (*quite at a loss*). What other man?

ROBERT. The man who killed himself. Did he earn that kiss?

HUBERT. Earn it?

ROBERT. There was something salt, something tart, in that act of mine. What was it? Generosity, or— (*He breaks off.*) Hubert, have I been a generous man? (*He looks with real curiosity at his brother.*)

HUBERT. Very,—sometimes.

ROBERT. Sometimes, yes,—sometimes. I took a beating for you once, do you remember, when you broke the rose-window in the chapel with a stone.

HUBERT (*warmly*). Yes.

ROBERT (*searching his memory*). But when our uncle gave us each a fawn, and yours had the prettier dapplings, I cut its tether and let it go loose in the forest.

HUBERT (*good-naturedly*). We were boys then.

ROBERT. Look out of the window. Are they coming?

HUBERT. Not yet.

ROBERT (*looking toward the window*). Wipe off the glass, will you?

HUBERT (*surprised*). The glass is quite clear.

ROBERT (*surprised in his turn*). Is it? You must look for me, then.

HUBERT. You are not dying?

ROBERT (*with a smile*). Not just yet. The kiss is in my veins. I shall live till they come. I shall live till you tell me.

HUBERT (*agitatedly*). What am I to tell you?

ROBERT. Whether they take the same road—or part.

HUBERT. Will it save you if—they part?

ROBERT. No, I shall die either way. But which will kill me, —pain or joy? Knowing that, I shall know what I am, a man who gave his life for others, or a trickster for whom his own death was a card in a game.

HUBERT (*looking out*). They are ready to start.

ROBERT. Hold me up. I must seem to see them. (*Hubert brings Robert's face into range with the window-glass.*)

HUBERT. He is helping her to mount.

ROBERT. In the court-yard?

HUBERT. Yes. He has mounted himself.

ROBERT (*after a pause*). They are in the alley now—leading to the high-road?

HUBERT. Yes. They are passing the window.

ROBERT. Do they speak to each other?

HUBERT. No.

ROBERT. Do they look at each other?

HUBERT. No. (*Silence.*)

ROBERT. They—they have reached the high-road?

HUBERT. Yes.

ROBERT. Do they ride—together?

HUBERT (*after a long pause, looking into his brother's face*). Together. (*A spasm of pain trenches the forehead of the dying man. Then he looks into Hubert's face with a smile of touching, almost tranquil, bitterness.*)

ROBERT. You see. (*He dies.*)

CURTAIN

GEOFFREY'S WIFE

CHARACTERS

GEOFFREY SELBORNE, *English baron, 35 years old*
DANIEL SELBORNE, *his brother, 23 years old*
ROGER SELBORNE, *his younger brother, 21 years old*
ADELAIDE SELBORNE, *Geoffrey's wife, not speaking*

Scene: a ruinous manor in a lonely and dreary district not far from a bleak sea-coast in northwestern England. Time: some period in the last fifteen years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

The stage represents the manor-hall, the main feature of which is a large stone central staircase, mounting from the first floor to a broad second-story gallery, behind which, in the centre, facing the head of the stair, is the ancient and battered oaken door of what is probably a bedchamber. On the lower floor two doors are rather guessed than seen; one, in the back wall left, opens on the courtyard; another, in the right wall front, leads to the inner rooms. Very little furniture; there is a table at the left, and a cupboard-like recess in the back wall next the door. A fire drowses in a fireplace behind the table. Staircase, floor of hall, walls, furniture, teem with evidences of neglect and disrepair. It is ten o'clock at night. Outside the chamber door to the right, Daniel Selborne, reclining on what looks like a grain sack, watches his brother Roger, who is climbing the stair with a cripple's curious combination of celerity and awkwardness. The brothers are strongly built, though each has a marked deformity, Roger in the leg, Daniel in the back, and their physique and dress must be as rude as is consistent with the retention of the sympathy of the audience for persons who are by class and birth gentlefolk.

DANIEL

Already?

ROGER

Ay, I follow.

DANIEL (*with a sneer*).

Speedily.

ROGER (*looking at his leg*).

Speed, say you? Speed! With that? (*He throws down another sack or cushion on the gallery floor at the left of the stairhead, and the brothers, reclining on opposite sides of the chamber door, turn their faces toward each other. They are evidently here for the night.*)

DANIEL

'Tis a stout leg,
Though twisted.

ROGER

Would you have me praise your back?
Not I. (*In another tone.*) She sleeps?

DANIEL

I think she sleeps. The room
Is still.

ROGER

And lampless. Oh, the lucky dark,
The darkness that can clasp her in its arms.

DANIEL

Talk not like that. I have a knife upon me,
And, though I think I love you, talk like that
Brings hand to haft.

ROGER

Tut! Fear me not. This leg
Should end misgiving—were she not Geoffrey's wife.

DANIEL

Why brought he her? Why left her to our care,
To mind us that, had God been good to us,
We had been men like others?

ROGER

We are naught
To him. He drank metheglin while we told
Of God's strokes on our brethren. Knows he now,
In his bright ease, if it were Lionel
Or Patrick whom the swollen river took,
Or Cuthbert whom the bolt of lightning slew;
Or if 'twere ten years or a twelvemonth back
When the plague set its tooth in Gamelyn?

DANIEL

He called me Cuthbert once. "He is dead," said I.
And he laughed, saying, "In this reeking moor,
One scarce knows if the living or the dead
Be sunk in earth more deeply."

ROGER

'Twas a taunt
Hateful and harsh.

DANIEL

Nay, nay, he hates us not.
He flicks us with his scorn, smiles, and forgets.

ROGER

Mind you that hour long since?

DANIEL

Ay, ay, I mind—
When we withstood him stoutly, and he turned
And called us lees and rinsings of the stock,
Told us our father in his cankered age
Begat us in derision, flung us forth
As scoffs and imprecations on mankind.

ROGER

We were boys then.

DANIEL

He scarcely more than boy.
He took all back; parted in gay good-will,
Nay, sent us in regretful afterthought
Doublets from Arras with a silken fringe.
We wore them not. (*He says this in moody reminiscence.*)

ROGER

The parish would have laughed
From Martinmas to Easter had they seen
This flesh in that apparel.

DANIEL

'Tis long since.
Why came he, after many years, with her?
Meant he harm to her?

ROGER

He was sleek of tongue.
They laughed together.

DANIEL

They are of the court
Where hatred laughs.

ROGER

Who knows what Geoffrey feels?
Yet when I think of what (*he lowers his voice*)—what had been mine
Had I been Geoffrey—

DANIEL (*starting up excitedly*).

In the name of God!

ROGER (*sternly*).

Down with you! Would a dagger in my breast
Bring fullness to your famine?

DANIEL (*settling back*).

In your breast!
In yours? Forgive me, Roger. Ere she came
And from beneath those proud and trembling lids
The undreamt-of looked upon us, each had thought
But of the other. What has happened since
Scarce know I, but I know that I could die
To save you from another, her from you.

ROGER

She sees us not. Blindness is merciful
To men like us.

DANIEL

She looked at me one day,
And smiled. (*Roger gives a short laugh.*) Not in derision.
Listen to me.
Her spaniel in the grating of a tower
High on the eastern parapet had wedged
Its tiny frame. I fetched it back to her
She looked at me; she thanked me with a smile;
Her hand to the white poppy on her breast
Moved lightly; but again she looked at me,

Looked at my unshorn chin and tangled hair,
And the hand paused, and, hesitating, drew
A florin from her girdle. Then I spoke:
"The poppy, please you, Madam"—that was all.
And she: "I had forgot; you are Geoffrey's kin,
Not his—nay, nay, what say I? Take the flower."
Her eye fell, as I took it, on my blouse,
My tattered blouse on which a hundred meals,
A brace of quagmires and a score of roads
Had splashed their mottlings. "Where," she syllabled,
"Where will you put it?" Ready was my tongue.
"From breast to breast the path is straight," I said.
I know not if my cheek was red; 'twas warm.
She laughed till all the ancient, crumbling stones
In this our old court laughed with her; then she paused,
Half doubtful, half in pity,—paused and healed
The bruises of her laughter with a smile.

ROGER

'Tis a good tale. I have no tale to tell,
And yet—

DANIEL

What say you?

ROGER

Know ye what I saw
To-night?

DANIEL (*frowning*).

Saw ye aught 'twere wrong—or well—to see?

ROGER

'Twas twilight. I bore water to the kine.
She—yonder (*pointing to the door*)—in her chamber—reached
an arm

To close the back-flung casement—and the wind
Caught at her sleeve, and I, uplooking, saw,
From finger-tip to shoulder, the bright arm
Bare in the dusk. The water at my feet,
Plashing, gave sign that I had dropped the pail.

DANIEL (*with pain*).

I have seen naught but the hand and the light wrist,
And that the bracelet shaded. (*Pause.*) Does she wear
Her bracelet through the night?

ROGER

I do not know.

DANIEL

She wears his ring, she wears his ring all night;
Its clasp is round her finger and her soul.

ROGER

How many nights have we slept here side by side?
I cannot keep the count.

DANIEL

The moon was young
That midnight—

ROGER

When you left our common bed.

DANIEL

Guessed you not why I left it?

ROGER

Guessed? I knew.
You went lest I should go.

DANIEL

You followed me.
I had been still; each step of your lame foot
Dinted the silence.

ROGER

On the topmost chair
You couched and spoke not, but you looked at me.

DANIEL

What need of words? I read your will in mine.

ROGER

What read you? What had you or I to hope?
She has a key. It is a powerful door.

DANIEL

The door is massive, but the lock is frail.

ROGER

Do you fear me?

DANIEL

Less than I fear myself.

ROGER

We are Geoffrey's brothers, she is Geoffrey's wife.
Half of me rages, half of me is glad,
That a rough arm and a stout purpose lies
Between me and that—wonder.

DANIEL

Stoutly said.
If each is prowler, each is watchman, too.
Dog to your wolf, wolf to your dog, am I.

ROGER

I cannot bear you should but *think* of her.

DANIEL

But *think!* How shall we fare when Geoffrey comes?
Geoffrey, he will not clasp her in his dreams.

ROGER

The thought of what may be if Geoffrey comes
I face not (*he looks grimly at Daniel*)—no, nor you.

DANIEL

Do men who fly
Face their pursuers? Think you he will come?

ROGER

She wrote two letters twenty days ago.

DANIEL

Two letters?

ROGER

Ay.

DANIEL

To Geoffrey,—and to whom?

ROGER

I know not—to her brother or her sire
Perchance,—what reck we?

DANIEL

She would leave the place.

ROGER

Who would not leave the place save those whose gloom
Its blackness fits?

DANIEL

Hard were it if he came
And took her.

ROGER

Ay,—or if he came and stayed.

DANIEL

Geoffrey is brother, master, lord of the house,
And yet who knows—if he were harsh with her—

ROGER (*poignantly*).

Or tender— (*They look fixedly at each other. A knock is heard at the outer door.*)

DANIEL

Listen! (*A second knock.*)

ROGER

Again.

DANIEL

Geoffrey?

ROGER

Perhaps.

DANIEL

Perhaps! In this dim hour in this lone spot
What margin for perhaps?

ROGER

Come! (*They rise.*)

DANIEL

Has she heard?
(*He goes to the chamber door and listens.*)

ROGER

She sleeps?

DANIEL

Nay, I hear nothing. Let us go. (*Knock once more. The brothers descend the stair, procure a torch, undo the fastenings of the door in the rear wall at left, and admit Geoffrey Selborne.*)

GEOFFREY

What! Daniel! Roger! Both afoot? Brave lads!
Ye keep long vigils.

ROGER

Have you ridden far?

GEOFFREY

From London, Roger, and I have ridden fast,
Save when the mire gripped at Saladin's heels.
Earth has claws in this region.

DANIEL (*taking Geoffrey's cloak*).
Has it rained?

GEOFFREY

Nay, splashes merely, yet (*he looks upward*) a roof is good,
Though but a patched roof, such as lets the sky
And the sky's tempers and distempers in. (*He reflects.*)
What had I in mind to tell you? Daniel!

DANIEL

Here.

GEOFFREY

Rouse Hodge and bid him serve my fainting horse
With bed and fodder.

DANIEL

Easier serve the horse
Than rouse old Hodge to serve him. I will go.

GEOFFREY

Thanks, Daniel. Give him water—not too much.
He is hot, I chill, with riding. (*Daniel goes out.*) Is old Hodge
Peevish as ever?

ROGER

He is sixty-nine.

GEOFFREY (*easily*).

Age, for each tooth she rifles from the jaw,
Sets a barb in the tongue. Have you some food?

ROGER

There's a cold loin of venison and some wine.

GEOFFREY (*seating himself at the table*).

Ay, bring me venison, bring me drink. I fast,
I thirst, and I am spent with weariness. (*Roger brings food and drink from cupboard.*)

ROGER (*drily*).

There is no more.

GEOFFREY

'Tis ample. (*Pause, then suddenly*) All is well?

ROGER

All's as it was, if that be—being well.

GEOFFREY (*in a low voice*).

My wife?

ROGER (*forcing himself to speak*).

Unchanged. A little pale perhaps.
Daily the bit of red near the left lip
Narrows and dims a little.

GEOFFREY

By the mass,
You watch her shrewdly.

ROGER (*grimly apologetic*).

When our hands are still,
Our eyes are busy.

GEOFFREY

She is cheerful?

ROGER

No,
But she weeps not.

GEOFFREY (*with vivid emphasis*).

There has come no man to the place?

ROGER

No man save Hodge and Daniel and myself,
If men we be.

GEOFFREY

No visitor?

ROGER

Not one.
The lord disdains our chambers and the thief
Our coffers and the beggar our repasts. (*Re-enter Daniel.*)

DANIEL

The horse is cared for.

GEOFFREY

Ye have seen no man
In the court?

DANIEL

Man? No.

GEOFFREY

No rider at my heels?

DANIEL

No, surely.

GEOFFREY

So be it. I do not think ye lie. (*He looks at both sharply, however.*)

DANIEL

Do brothers ask of brothers if they lie?

GEOFFREY

Brothers do much ye dream not of. Tush, tush,
I would not chafe ye. Ye live hard, and I,
Caught in that daintier hardship men call ease,
Neglect ye and am sorry and shall still,
Sorrowing or not, neglect ye. (*He looks at them thoughtfully.*) Had ye backs—
Or legs—a court could glance at unamused—
But pass we that. This Perrault will be here
Shortly. I have outsped him, but his horse
Has mettle and endurance.

DANIEL

If he comes,
We shall admit him?

GEOFFREY (*pausing, knife and fork in hand, in whimsical yet not unserious deliberation*).

Shall we shut him out?
His wit would gnaw an entrance. Let him in?
He, courtier, is disarmed by courtesy.
Admit him. (*He speaks with curt decision. Pause.*) Has she written aught—my wife?

ROGER (*unwillingly*).

She wrote a letter.

GEOFFREY

When?

ROGER

Three weeks ago.

GEOFFREY (*intensely*).

Two letters?

ROGER

Two.

GEOFFREY

Even as I guessed. How else
Construe the suave complacence of his smile?
She is light—a woman.

ROGER (*hotly*).

Geoffrey!

DANIEL (*also hotly*).

She is snow.

GEOFFREY

Snow, ay,—or water. Why so grim of cheer?
Trust ye in women so devoutly? Stay,
I have a bit of writing in my scrip
Instructive to such confidence as yours.
(*He passes to Daniel a brief letter taken from his scrip.*)
Read that. (*Daniel hesitates.*) 'Tis but a line.

DANIEL (*sullenly*).

I cannot read.

The old priest, napping in the ingle-nook,
Taught me, 'twixt yawns, too little.

GEOFFREY (*with a certain consideration*).

I had forgot.

They spared no tendance for ye. All was mine.
Hearken,—what say ye to a line like this—
"Lover or husband, who comes first I choose"?
Is she not dauntless? Has she not a wit
To ensnare mankind with its bright impishness?

ROGER

She wrote not words like those.

DANIEL

My life upon't.

GEOFFREY

Believe or doubt as suits your pleasure, lads.
If ye be eyeless for the lettered page,
And earless for its content, please yourselves.
And yet (*he reflects briefly*)—sit down and let me tell my tale.

I have eaten and drunk and have no will to bed,
And, should he seek her in my absence, you
Might act the wiselier did ye know the truth.
Sit down. (*Roger and Daniel sit.*) Why think ye that I brought her here?

ROGER

We think not. Is it ours to think?

GEOFFREY

I had hope
To tame her in this kennel. Was it wise?
Women are reinless, unsubduable;
The court steals half their virtue; solitude,
In which we coop them, takes the other half.
This Perrault is a gamesome cavalier,
Tongue sharp as rapier, rapier swift as tongue,
With eyes that sue and mock; he sought my wife,
Played with her, danced and sang, penned madrigals,
Whispered soft nothings. I, at the earliest sign,
Fearlessly laughed, then laughed to stifle fear,
Then feared and laughed not. Still I sheathed my voice
In blandness when I met him in the hall.
His irony on mine, like lance on shield,
Shivered. Days passed. I, in a sudden spleen,
Swept her from London, brought her to this bourne
To which—so reasoned I—nor hoof nor hope
Of cavalier might track her. (*During this speech Roger and Daniel have with difficulty mastered their emotions.*)

ROGER

You believe— (*He breaks off.*)

GEOFFREY

That she is faithless? Nay, I say not that.

I think of her virtue but as a tent in the wind,
Unfallen but shaking.

DANIEL

It were wise in you
To think so—always.

GEOFFREY (*continuing*).

I took horse and rode
Feverishly till one jocund morn I met
This Perrault in the courtyard of an inn.
I thought he would have blushed or paled. Not he.
The plume of his doffed bonnet flicked the straw
In an obsequious circle. "So I too
Was journeying? Chance was gracious." Chance—his lip
Fondled the word. "Northwestward? Better yet."
His friends, to chase a silver-footed doe,
In some rough county with a craglike name
Gathering, besought his presence. To be short,
We rode together, parted, lost and found
Each other, slept once in the selfsame bed
Where beds were few. And still I asked myself:
"Lover or husband, who comes first I choose"—
Hides he that missive folded in his scrip?
The question burnt my lips, and, from the lips
Pressed backward, burnt my entrails. But my face
Smiled, and the quip was agile on my tongue.
I joyed in his bright malice, he in mine;
Verily we loved each other for the grace
With which each masked his hatred. Horse to horse
Was equal; vain—evasion; vain to rise
At midnight. So we journeyed till at last,
By a deceit I love not, yet employ,
I bribed the servitor at a roadside inn

To tell him, should he ask, his shortest way
Lay crosswise to the westward,—true enough
By miles, but by morasses!—(*He breaks off with a little laugh.*)

ROGER

He is gulfed
Perhaps in the deep swamp.

GEOFFREY

No fear of that.
Morasses will not stay his nimbleness
Longer than till the day break. If he comes,
He must have shelter; cheer he scarce can have.
They have a call, the Perraults—it were well
Ye knew it—*she,* I doubt not, knows it well;
Three trebles and one low, deep organ note
That mimics thunder. 'Tis like this. (*He executes four notes.*)
Enough. The night grows aged, and I droop
With vigil. Watch ye, if ye will, till dawn.
I'll to my bed. (*He rises wearily. Daniel and Roger rise also with a peculiar deliberation that savors both of fear and menace.*)

DANIEL

Where sleep you?

GEOFFREY (*opening his eyes a little, but yawning*).

Where? She lies
In the chamber at the stairhead, does she not? (*They are silent. He resumes impatiently.*)
What mean you? Speak.

ROGER (*in a barely audible voice*).

She lies at the head of the stair.

(*Roger and Daniel place themselves by a series of apparently casual movements between Geoffrey and the foot of the staircase.*)

DANIEL (*same tone as Roger*).

A bed is made in the turret. (*He points right.*) It is late.
Do not disturb her, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY

Late! Disturb!
What know ye? Ignorance should hold its tongue.
Husbands to faithful wives are opportune
Always; to the faithless never. Let me prove
This woman by that trial.

ROGER

Let her sleep.
She is young. Day comes apace. Disturb her not.

GEOFFREY

What holds ye, wine or madness? Let me pass.

DANIEL

Geoffrey, take heed! You may not climb that stair.

GEOFFREY

In my own house! *Take heed!* Of mine own kin!

ROGER

Kin, if you stop. Set foot upon that stair,
You are to us no brother.

GEOFFREY

What is that?

DANIEL (*very low*).

Geoffrey, there is in us that which will not bear
The touch of man upon her.

GEOFFREY

By my soul!

ROGER

We die ere man shall touch her. Better so
Than die to see him touch her.

GEOFFREY

God in heaven!

DANIEL

Ye speak of God. If ye would meet him, set
One foot upon that stair.

GEOFFREY (*fiercely*).

I have a sword.

DANIEL

You have a breast; we, daggers.

GEOFFREY

Touch of man!
This were a jest to shake the theatre.
Do ye step between the husband and the wife?

ROGER

Your hands are hands and your lips lips. Can rites,
Can oil or ink or water make it fit
You touch her while we live?

GEOFFREY (*struck by a thought*).

Do ye then dream—?

ROGER

Look at his back. Look at my leg. *We*—dream!

GEOFFREY (*struck by a second thought*).

What motive, then? What purpose? Is it so? (*He puts his hand to his forehead.*)
Has he then come before me, bought ye, known
My nearness, and yet dared— (*With a burst of fury.*) Is he with her?

ROGER

No.

DANIEL

No.

ROGER

We swear it.

GEOFFREY

Oaths are frippery.

(*He plants his foot upon the stair, and makes as if to draw his sword. Daniel is instantly upon him, wrenching the sword from his hand, while Roger draws a dagger. Roger does not strike, but Geoffrey's hand, in the attempt to grasp Roger's wrist, incurs a fleshwound from which the blood out-gushes freely.*)

ROGER

You are hurt?

GEOFFREY (*to whom the clash and the flow of blood have restored his habitual self-control*).

Not hurt—not greatly. Calm your fears,
Good Roger, to whose brotherly address
I owe this checkmate. For to-night you win.

Though I had arms and you were weaponless,
I would not in this dripping disarray
Startle the lady you defend. Have I naught
To stay this outpour? (*He draws a handkerchief from his doublet and wraps it with hasty dexterity about his hand. Then he glances toward the chamber.*)
Let the woman sleep.
I too am drowsy. I have ridden far
And lost through this fraternal cut-and-thrust
Some ounces of my vigor. If I go
To the turret, whither sounds obscurely climb,
Can I trust ye to guard the lady's rest
From foreign visitation till the dawn?
Will ye, who sever wife from husband, wrench
Leman from gallant? Furrow not your brows.
I spake the word to prove ye. Can I trust
Your vigils?

DANIEL

We sleep little.

ROGER

Sleep is hard
On the stone floor at the stairhead.

GEOFFREY (*turning curiously upon them*).

Ye sleep there? (*They nod.*)
Nightly? (*They nod again.*)
Together? (*They nod still a third time.*)
Is the world distraught?
I could half pity ye, unhappy boys. (*He looks at them intently, then returns to the immediate problem.*)
Ye vouch, then, for her safety?

ROGER, DANIEL

With our lives.

GEOFFREY

If Perrault knocks, admit him, greet him well.
But if he mount—or she descend—the stair—

ROGER

Life ends for us ere dawn.

DANIEL

We shall not live
To face the retribution in your eyes.

GEOFFREY

Ye would kill yourselves?

ROGER, DANIEL

Ay.

GEOFFREY

Ye are stout of soul.
But I would try you differently. Vow each
To slay the other if the other fail.

ROGER, DANIEL

We make the vow.

GEOFFREY

I trust ye. Fetch a torch.
(*Roger fetches a torch from wall left. Geoffrey takes it.*)
Good night. To-morrow I will talk with you. (*He goes out right. Roger and Daniel follow him an instant with their eyes, then prepare to resume their watch. Daniel puts the remains of Geoffrey's meal in the cupboard.*)

DANIEL

Shall I put out the lamp?

ROGER

No, let it burn.
A lamp is still a friend to vigilance.

DANIEL (*with Roger again at the stair-foot*).

You think he will take her hence?

ROGER

I think he will.

DANIEL

To-morrow?

ROGER

If God be not merciful.

DANIEL

We might entreat.

ROGER

Entreaty would but fix
His purpose. (*They mount the stair to the top. As they dispose themselves on the sacks, Daniel resumes.*) Roger, if she left her room—

ROGER

Well?

DANIEL

We are pledged.

ROGER

To stop her.

DANIEL

Stop her! How,
If speech sufficed not?

ROGER (*slowly*).

Geoffrey, I presume,
Remembered we had hands. Are you content?

DANIEL (*looking at Roger*).

Whose hands?

ROGER

What say you?

DANIEL

Yours,—or mine?

ROGER (*vehemently*).

Both, both.

DANIEL (*solemnly*).

If your hand touched her—

ROGER (*diviningly*).

Would you—

DANIEL

What know I?

ROGER

These are but dreams. The hour will tutor us.

DANIEL

Or blast us. Speech is idle. Let us rest. (*They cease to speak, and the stage is noiseless for some seconds. A low call is suddenly audible from the courtyard. Daniel and Roger sit up.*)

ROGER

Listen! (*The call is repeated.*)

DANIEL

Three trebles.

ROGER

A deep organ-note.

DANIEL

Shall we go down?

ROGER

Why go?

DANIEL

To let him in.

Geoffrey allows him entrance.

ROGER

If he crave
Admisison. He has knocked not. He has called.
Being naught but wolf, he is not hound enough
To scratch at the door for entrance.

DANIEL

Has she moved?

ROGER

Go you, and listen.

DANIEL (*at the door, listening at the keyhole*).

All is still—quite still.

ROGER

Her feet are ever soundless.

DANIEL

Not a breath.

Unless—nay, that was fancy. Surely, but—
Do fancies come so often? (*Slight pause.*) Roger!

ROGER

Well?

DANIEL

The casement grates a little.

ROGER (*breathless*).

Are you sure?

DANIEL

Ay. Rust is garrulous. The casement creaks
And opens.

ROGER

Be it so, what matters it?
A woman, hearing strange sounds in the night,
Hastes to the window. Innocence still fears,
And fear is curious. (He *crouches on the floor beside Daniel. Both listen.*)

DANIEL

All is hushed again.
Why do you look at me? There was no sound.
There was no sound, I tell you, like a key
Turned in a surly lock.

ROGER (*turning to Daniel after a long pause*).

Tell me once more
There is no sound—that life for you and me
May still be—possible.

DANIEL (*tensely*).

If she comes forth—
We—seize her?

ROGER

We have promised.

DANIEL

We are true
To Geoffrey—but if your hand touched her first—

ROGER

Nay, they shall move together.

DANIEL

Back! She comes.

(*Each moves to his side of the door, which slowly and heavily swings back to reveal Adelaide Selborne standing upon the threshold in a silhouette which, dim as it is, has the precision of an etching. In the faint light her features are invisible, but the taper which she carries in her right hand helps the onlooker to divine the presence of vivid masses of abundant red-gold hair, which a single careless band sustains in loose confinement about the head and shoulders. As she advances toward the stairhead, the onlooker becomes kindlingly aware of the superb grace and high alertness of her movement, undisguised even by the clinging folds of the long riding-habit, the train of which drops in picturesque accumulation from the left arm.*)

ROGER, DANIEL

Lady! (*Adelaide, turning at the stairhead, speaks no word, but waves them back with a superb gesture that scarcely condescends to be imperious. As Roger and Daniel spring forward, she quickens her pace. For a second the two men are hardly conscious of what is going forward. They are waked from their stupor by the sound of an opening door in the lower story, succeeded almost instantly by the noise of a horse's hoof pawing the stones in the courtyard. As they come to themselves, they are aware of a strange thing; each is holding with his own left*

hand the right wrist of the other in a grip of iron. They release each other mechanically, and look long into each other's eyes.)

ROGER

She hath escaped us.

DANIEL

By our fault.

ROGER

Ye know the pledge.

DANIEL

The breach is evident. (*They both draw their daggers.*)

ROGER

My dagger has an admirable edge.

DANIEL

This arm is sure. The end will tarry not.

ROGER (*looking at the sacks on the floor*).

We have slept ill to-night.

DANIEL

We shall sleep well
Henceforward. Ye are ready?

ROGER

Ready.

DANIEL

Strike.

(*Each stabs the other to the heart. As they fall, there is heard through the outer door, which Adelaide has failed to close behind her, mingled sounds of a woman's laughter and the bridle-bells of a horse plunging suddenly into the night.*)

CURTAIN